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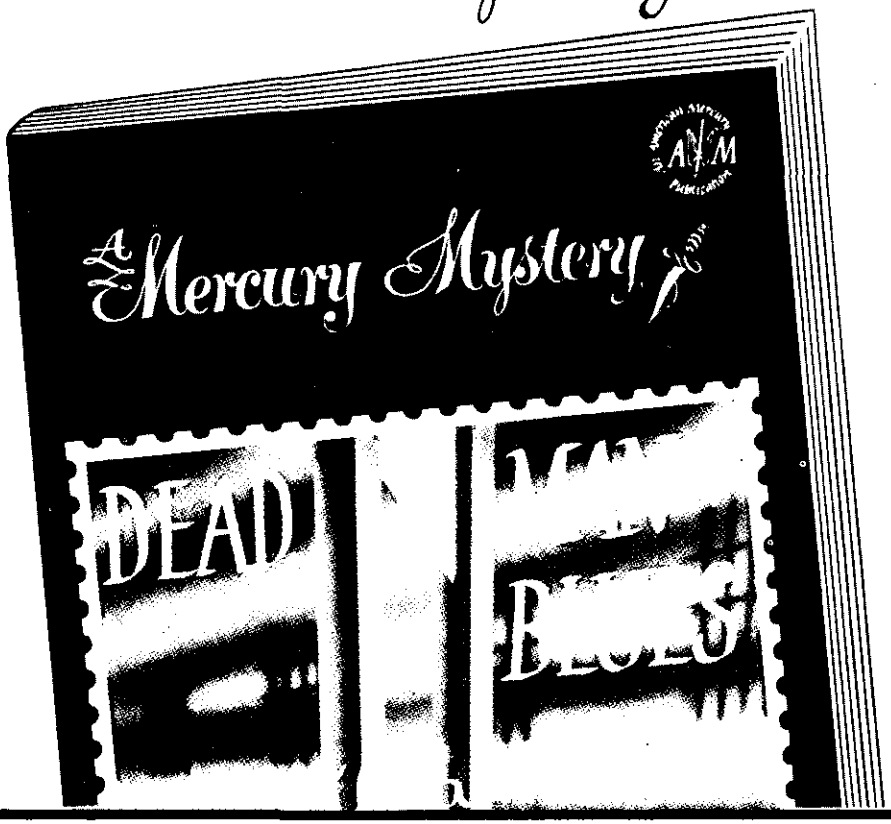

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THE "PERFECT CRIME" DETECTIVE STORY
THE CAT'S-PAW — *Stanley Ellin* — 3

THE GANGSTER DETECTIVE STORY
OUTSIDE THE LAW — *Francis Iles* — 17

THE "GENTLE GRAFTER" DETECTIVE STORY
AN HONEST DEAL — *Walter D. Edmonds* — 28

THE DEDUCTIVE DETECTIVE STORY
LACRIMAE RERUM — *Edmund Crispin* — 42

THE HARDBOILED DETECTIVE STORY
BLUE GLASS — *Raoul Whitfield* — 52

THE WESTERN DETECTIVE STORY
HARD SHERIFF — *Robert Arthur* — 65

THE RIDDLE STORY
A LADY'S SHOE — *James M. Barrie* — 69

EQMM "FIRST"
ASK MARIA — *Floyd Mahannah* — 81

LEAVES FROM THE EDITORS' NOTEBOOK
QUEEN'S QUORUM: PART ONE — *Ellery Queen* — 98

THE HUMOROUS DETECTIVE STORY
THE BITER BIT — *Wilkie Collins* — 105

SPEAKING OF CRIME
SOCK-THE-MYSTERY YEAR — *Anthony Boucher* — 126

THE "LOCKED ROOM" DETECTIVE STORY
ROOM NUMBER TWENTY-THREE — *Hugh Pentecost* — 129

INDEX TO VOLUME THIRTEEN — 144

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1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, EQMM will award five (5) Second Prizes of $500 each, and five (5) Third Prizes of $300 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at EQMM's regular rates.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1949.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1949. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1950.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $35 for the original edition, $25 for reprint editions, $25 for British book anthology rights, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: STANLEY ELLIN

In last year's contest Stanley Ellin won a Special Prize for the Best First Story. Certainly, "The Specialty of the House" was an artistic and compelling shocker. We still remember how many people tapped us from behind, resting their hands, almost tenderly, on our meaty shoulders; and when we turned around, how they commented on the lingering aftertaste of Mr. Ellin's concoction. We shuddered every time, and we still experience a frisson d'horreur *at the thought of Sbirro's fascinating restaurant and even more fascinating cuisine.*

Christopher Morley considered Mr. Ellin's tasty tale "worth all the rest of the book [THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, *1948*] *together." Mr. Morley went on to say, in his review of the book in the "Book-of-the-Month Club News": "'The Specialty of the House' isn't really a whodunit but a whoateit (if that is decipherable), but for macaber and skill in suspense it is worth a double-jaw of porcelain false teeth . . . You will remember* [*Stanley Ellin's*] *tale. This is, for the connoisseur, the* echt Blutwurst *and gravy."*

There is no doubt that Stanley Ellin's prizewinning story of last year would have ranked much higher — perhaps have actually won First Prize, as so many readers thought it deserved — if its basic theme had not been anticipated in at least two earlier stories. More than a decade before Lord Dunsany wrote that macabre masterpiece, "The Two Bottles of Relish," and about the same time Geoffrey Household used a variation of the identical theme in "Taboo." Had Mr. Ellin's story not been preceded by two such acknowledged classics, his own powerful conception would have made homicidal history.

Now we bring you Stanley Ellin's new prizewinner, and it is precisely that — new. True, Mr. Ellin again plays with a time-honored basic theme — "the perfect crime." But this time Mr. Ellin does not merely ring a change on the old pattern: "The Cat's-Paw" is a completely fresh approach, and it has that same memorable quality and skill in suspense which made "The Specialty of the House" so special . . .

THE CAT'S-PAW

by STANLEY ELLIN

THERE was little to choose among any of the rooms in the boarding house in their dingy, linoleum-floored, brass-bedsteaded uniformity, but the day he answered the advertisement on the *Help Wanted* page, Mr. Crabtree

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realized that one small advantage accrued to his room: the public telephone in the hallway was opposite his door, and simply by keeping an ear cocked he could be at the instrument a moment after the first shrill warning ring had sounded.

In view of this he closed his application for employment not only with his signature, but with the number of the telephone as well. His hand shook a little as he did so; he felt party to a gross deception in implying that the telephone was his personal property, but the prestige to be gained this way, so he thought, might somehow weight the balance in his favor. To that end he tremorously sacrificed the unblemished principles of a lifetime.

The advertisement itself had been nothing less than a miracle. *Man wanted,* it said, *for hard work at moderate pay. Sober, honest, industrious former clerk, age 45–50 preferred. Write all details. Box 111;* and Mr. Crabtree, peering incredulously through his spectacles, had read it with a shuddering dismay at the thought of all his fellows, age 45–50, who might be seeking hard work at moderate pay, and who might have read the same notice minutes, or perhaps, hours, before.

His answer could have served as a model Letter of Application for Employment. His age was forty-eight, his health excellent. He was unmarried. He had served one single firm for thirty years; had served it faithfully and well; had an admirable record for attendance and punctuality. Unfortunately, the firm had merged with another and larger; regrettably, many capable employees had to be released. Hours? Unimportant. His only interest was in doing a good job no matter the time involved. Salary? A matter entirely in the hands of his prospective employer. His previous salary had been fifty dollars per week, but naturally that had come after years of proved worth. Available for an interview at any time. References from the following. The signature. And then, the telephone number.

All this had been written and rewritten a dozen times until Mr. Crabtree had been satisfied that every necessary word was there, each word in its proper place. Then, in the copperplate hand that had made his ledgers a thing of beauty, the final draft had been transferred to fine bond paper purchased toward this very contingency, and posted.

After that, alone with his speculations on whether a reply would come by mail, by telephone, or not at all, Mr. Crabtree spent two endless and heart-fluttering weeks until the moment when he answered a call and heard his name come over the wire like the crack of doom.

"Yes," he said shrilly, "I'm Crabtree! I sent a letter!"

"Calmly, Mr. Crabtree, calmly," said the voice. It was a clear thin voice which seemed to pick up and savor each syllable before delivering it, and it had an instant and chilling

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effect on Mr. Crabtree who was clutching the telephone as if pity could be squeezed from it.

"I have been considering your application," the voice went on with the same painful deliberation, "and I am most gratified by it. Most gratified. But before calling the matter settled, I should like to make clear the terms of employment I am offering. You would not object to my discussing it now?"

The word *employment* rang dizzily through Mr. Crabtree's head. "No," he said, "please do."

"Very well. First of all, do you feel capable of operating your own establishment?"

"My own establishment?"

"Oh, have no fears about the size of the establishment or the responsibilities involved. It is a matter of some confidential reports which must be drawn up regularly. You would have your own office, your name on the door, and, of course, no supervision directly over you. That should explain the need for an exceptionally reliable man."

"Yes," said Mr. Crabtree, "but those confidential reports . . ."

"Your office will be supplied with a list of several important corporations. It will also receive subscriptions to a number of financial journals which frequently make mention of those same corporations. You will note all such references as they appear, and, at the end of each day, consolidate them into a report which will be mailed to me. I must add that none of this calls for any theoretical work or literary treatment. Accuracy, brevity, clarity: those are the three measures to go by. You understand that, of course?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Crabtree fervently.

"Excellent," said the voice. "Now, your hours will be from nine to five, six days a week, with an hour off at noon for lunch. I must stress this: I am insistent on punctuality and attendance, and I expect you to be as conscientious about these things as if you were under my personal supervision every moment of the day. I hope I do not offend you when I emphasize this?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Mr. Crabtree. "I . . ."

"Let me continue," the voice said. "Here is the address where you will appear one week from today, and the number of your room" — Mr. Crabtree without pencil or paper at hand pressed the numbers frantically into his memory — "and the office will be completely prepared for you. The door will be open, and you will find two keys in a drawer of the desk: one for the door and one for the cabinet in the office. In the desk you will also find the list I mentioned, as well as the materials needed in making out your reports. In the cabinet you will find a stock of periodicals to start work on."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Crabtree, "but those reports . . ."

"They should contain every single item of interest about the corpora-

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tions on your list, from business transactions to changes in personnel. And they must be mailed to me immediately upon your leaving the office each day. Is that clear?"

"Only one thing," said Mr. Crabtree. "To whom — where do I mail them?"

"A pointless question," said the voice sharply, much to Mr. Crabtree's alarm. "To the box number with which you are already familiar, of course."

"Of course," said Mr. Crabtree.

"Now," said the voice with a gratifying return to its original deliberate tones, "the question of salary. I have given it a good deal of thought, since as you must realize, there are a number of factors involved. In the end, I let myself be guided by the ancient maxim: a good workman is worthy of his hire — you recall those words?"

"Yes," said Mr. Crabtree.

"And," the voice said, "a poor workman can be easily dispensed with. On that basis, I am prepared to offer you fifty-two dollars a week. Is that satisfactory?"

Mr. Crabtree stared at the telephone dumbly and then recovered his voice. "Very," he gasped. "Oh, very much so. I must confess I never . . ."

The voice brought him up sharply. "But that is conditional, you understand. You will be — to use a rather clumsy term — on probation until you have proved yourself. Either the job is handled to perfection, or there is no job."

Mr. Crabtree felt his knees turn to water at the grim suggestion. "I'll do my best," he said. "I most certainly will do my absolute best."

"And," the voice went on relentlessly, "I attach great significance to the way you observe the confidential nature of your work. It is not to be discussed with anyone, and since the maintenance of your office and supplies lies entirely in my hands there can be no excuse for a defection. I have also removed temptation in the form of a telephone which you will *not* find on your desk. I hope I do not seem unjust in my abhorrence of the common practice where employees waste their time in idle conversation during working hours."

Since the death of an only sister twenty years before, there was not a soul in the world who would have dreamed of calling Mr. Crabtree to make any sort of conversation whatsoever; but he only said, "No, sir. Absolutely not."

"Then you are in agreement with all the terms we have discussed?"

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Crabtree.

"Any further questions?"

"One thing," said Mr. Crabtree. "My salary. How . . ."

"It will reach you at the end of each week," said the voice, "in cash. Anything else?"

Mr. Crabtree's mind was now a veritable log-jam of questions, but he found it impossible to fix on any particular one. Before he could do so, the voice said crisply, "Good luck, then," and there was the click which

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told him his caller had hung up. It was only when he attempted to do the same that he discovered his hand had been clenched so tightly around the receiver that it cost him momentary anguish to disengage it.

It must be admitted that the first time Mr. Crabtree approached the address given him, it would not have surprised him greatly to find no building there at all. But the building was there, reassuring in its immensity, teeming with occupants who packed the banks of elevators solidly, and, in the hallways, looked through him and scurried around him with efficient disinterest.

The office was there too, hidden away at the end of a devious corridor of its own on the very top floor, a fact called to Mr. Crabtree's attention by a stairway across the corridor, which led up to an open door through which the flat gray of the sky could be seen.

The most impressive thing about the office was the CRABTREE'S AFFILIATED REPORTS boldly stenciled on the door. Opening the door, one entered an incredibly small and narrow room made even smaller by the massive dimensions of the furniture that crowded it. To the right, immediately inside the door, was a gigantic filing cabinet. Thrust tightly against it, but still so large that it utilized the remainder of the wall space on that side was a huge, old-fashioned desk with a swivel chair before it.

The window set in the opposite wall was in keeping with the furniture. It was an immense window, broad and high, and its sill came barely above Mr. Crabtree's knees. He felt a momentary qualm when he first glanced through it and saw the sheer dizzying drop below, the terrifying quality of which was heightened by the blind, windowless walls of the building directly across from him.

One look was enough; henceforth, Mr. Crabtree kept the bottom section of the window securely fastened and adjusted only the top section to his convenience.

The keys were in a desk drawer; pen, ink, a box of nibs, a deck of blotters, and a half-dozen other accessories more impressive than useful were in another drawer; a supply of stamps was at hand; and, most pleasant, there was a plentiful supply of stationery, each piece bearing the letterhead, *Crabtree's Affiliated Reports*, the number of the office, and the address of the building. In his delight at this discovery Mr. Crabtree dashed off a few practice lines with some bold flourishes of the pen, and then, a bit alarmed at his own prodigality, carefully tore the sheet to minute shreds and dropped it into the wastebasket at his feet.

After that, his efforts were devoted wholly to the business at hand. The filing cabinet disgorged a dismayingly large file of publications which had to be pored over, line by line, and Mr. Crabtree never finished studying a page without the harrowing sensation

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that he had somehow bypassed the mention of a name which corresponded to one on the typed list he had found, as promised, in the desk. Then he would retrace the entire page with an awful sense of dallying at his work, and groan when he came to the end of it without finding what he had not wanted to find in the first place.

It seemed to him at times that he could never possibly deplete the monstrous pile of periodicals before him. Whenever he sighed with pleasure at having made some headway, he would be struck with the gloomy foreknowledge that the next morning would find a fresh delivery of mail at his door and, consequently, more material to add to the pile.

There were, however, breaks in this depressing routine. One was the preparation of the daily report, a task which, somewhat to Mr. Crabtree's surprise, he found himself learning to enjoy; the other was the prompt arrival each week of the sturdy envelope containing his salary down to the last dollar bill, although this was never quite the occasion for unalloyed pleasure it might have been.

Mr. Crabtree would carefully slit open one end of the envelope, remove the money, count it, and place it neatly in his ancient wallet. Then he would poke trembling exploratory fingers into the envelope, driven by the fearful recollection of his past experience to look for the notice that would tell him his services were no longer required. That was always a bad moment, and it had the unfailing effect of leaving him ill and shaken until he could bury himself in his work again.

The work was soon part of him. He had ceased bothering with the typed list; every name on it was firmly imprinted in his mind, and there were restless nights when he could send himself off to sleep merely by repeating the list a few times. One name in particular had come to intrigue him, merited special attention. *Efficiency Instruments, Ltd.* was unquestionably facing stormy weather. There had been drastic changes in personnel, talks of a merger, sharp fluctuations on the market.

It rather pleased Mr. Crabtree to discover that with the passage of weeks into months each of the names on his list had taken on a vivid personality for him. *Amalgamated* was steady as a rock, stolid in its comfortable success; *Universal* was high-pitched, fidgety in its exploration of new techniques; and so on down the line. But *Efficiency Instruments, Ltd.* was Mr. Crabtree's pet project, and he had, more than once, nervously caught himself giving it perhaps a shade more attention than it warranted. He brought himself up sharply at such times; impartiality must be maintained, otherwise. . . .

It came without any warning at all. He returned from lunch, punctual as ever, opened the door of the office, and knew he was standing face to face with his employer.

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"Come in, Mr. Crabtree," said the clear, thin voice, "and shut the door."

Mr. Crabtree closed the door and stood speechless.

"I must be a prepossessing figure," said the visitor with a certain relish, "to have such a potent effect on you. You know who I am, of course?"

To Mr. Crabtree's numbed mind the large, bulbous eyes fixed unwinkingly on him, the wide, flexible mouth, the body, short and round as a barrel, bore a horrifying resemblance to a frog sitting comfortably at the edge of a pond, with himself in the unhappy role of a fly hovering close by.

"I believe," said Mr. Crabtree shakily, "that you are my employer, Mr. . . . Mr. . . ."

A stout forefinger nudged Mr. Crabtree's ribs playfully. "As long as the bills are paid, the name is unimportant, eh, Mr. Crabtree? However, for the sake of expedience, let me be known to you as — say — George Spelvin. Have you ever encountered the ubiquitous Mr. Spelvin in your journeyings, Mr. Crabtree?"

"I'm afraid not," said Mr. Crabtree miserably.

"Then you are not a playgoer, and that is all to the good. And if I may hazard a guess, you are not one to indulge yourself in literature or the cinema either?"

"I do try to keep up with the daily newspaper," said Mr. Crabtree stoutly. "There's a good deal to read in it, you know, Mr. Spelvin, and it's not always easy, considering my work here, to find time for other diversions. That is, if a man wants to keep up with the newspapers."

The corners of the wide mouth lifted in what Mr. Crabtree hoped was a smile. "That is precisely what I hoped to hear you say. Facts, Mr. Crabtree, facts! I wanted a man with a single-minded interest in facts, and your words now as well as your application to your work tell me I have found him in you. I am very gratified, Mr. Crabtree."

Mr. Crabtree found that the blood was thumping pleasantly through his veins. "Thank you. Thank you again, Mr. Spelvin. I know I've been trying very hard, but I didn't know whether . . . Won't you sit down?" Mr. Crabtree tried to get his arm around the barrel before him in order to swing the chair into position, and failed. "The office is a bit small. But very comfortable," he stammered hastily.

"I am sure it is suitable," said Mr. Spelvin. He stepped back until he was almost fixed against the window and indicated the chair. "Now I should like you to be seated, Mr. Crabtree, while I discuss the matter I came on."

Under the spell of that commanding hand Mr. Crabtree sank into the chair and pivoted it until he faced the window and the squat figure outlined against it. "If there is any question about today's report," he said, "I am afraid it isn't complete yet. There were some notes on *Efficiency Instruments* . . ."

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Mr. Spelvin waved the matter aside indifferently. "I am not here to discuss that," he said slowly. "I am here to find the answer to a problem which confronts me. And I rely on you, Mr. Crabtree, to help me find that answer."

"A problem?" Mr. Crabtree found himself warm with a sense of well-being. "I'll do everything I can to help, Mr. Spelvin. Everything I possibly can."

The bulging eyes probed his worriedly. "Then tell me this, Mr. Crabtree: how would you go about killing a man?"

"I?" said Mr. Crabtree. "How would I go . . . I'm afraid I don't understand, Mr. Spelvin."

"I said," Mr. Spelvin repeated, carefully stressing each word, "how would you go about killing a man?"

Mr. Crabtree's jaw dropped. "But I couldn't. I wouldn't. That," he said, "that would be murder!"

"Exactly," said Mr. Spelvin.

"But you're joking," said Mr. Crabtree, and tried to laugh, without managing to get more than a thin, breathless wheeze through his constricted throat. Even that pitiful effort was cut short by the sight of the stony face before him. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Spelvin, terribly sorry. You can see it's not the customary . . . it's not the kind of thing . . ."

"Mr. Crabtree. In the financial journals you study so assiduously you will find my name — my own name — repeated endlessly. I have a finger in many pies, Mr. Crabtree, and it always prods the plum. To use the more blatant adjectives, I am wealthy and powerful far beyond your wildest dreams — granting that you are capable of wild dreams — and a man does not attain that position by idling his time away on pointless jokes, or in passing the time of day with hirelings. My time is limited, Mr. Crabtree. If you cannot answer my question, say so, and let it go at that!"

"I don't believe I can," said Mr. Crabtree piteously.

"You should have said that at once," Mr. Spelvin replied, "and spared me my moment of choler. Frankly, I did not believe you could answer my question, and if you had, it would have been a most disillusioning experience. You see, Mr. Crabtree, I envy, I deeply envy, your serenity of existence where such questions never even enter. Unfortunately, I am not in that position. At one point in my career, I made a mistake, the only mistake that has ever marked my rise to fortune. This, in time, came to the attention of a man who combines ruthlessness and cleverness to a dangerous degree, and I have been in the power of that man since. He is, in fact, a blackmailer, a common blackmailer who has come to set too high a price on his wares, and so, must now pay for them himself."

"You intend," said Mr. Crabtree hoarsely, "to kill him?"

Mr. Spelvin threw out a plump hand in protest. "If a fly rested in the palm of that hand," he said sharply,

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"I could not find the power to close my fingers and crush the life from it. To be blunt, Mr. Crabtree, I am totally incapable of committing an act of violence, and while that may be an admirable quality in many ways, it is merely an embarrassment now, since the man must certainly be killed." Mr. Spelvin paused. "Nor is this a task for a paid assassin. If I resorted to one, I would most assuredly be exchanging one blackmailer for another, and that is altogether impractical." Mr. Spelvin paused again. "So, Mr. Crabtree, you can see there is only one conclusion to be drawn: the responsibility for destroying my tormentor rests entirely on you."

"Me!" cried Mr. Crabtree. "Why, I could never — no, never!"

"Oh, come," said Mr. Spelvin brusquely. "You are working yourself into a dangerous state. Before you carry it any further, Mr. Crabtree, I should like to make clear that your failure to carry out my request means that when you leave this office today, you leave it permanently. I cannot tolerate an employee who does not understand his position."

"Not tolerate!" said Mr. Crabtree. "But that is not right, that is not right at all, Mr. Spelvin. I've been working hard." His spectacles blurred. He fumbled with them, cleaned them carefully, replaced them on his nose. "And to leave me with such a secret. I don't see it; I don't see it at all. Why," he said in alarm, "it's a matter for the police!"

To his horror Mr. Spelvin's face turned alarmingly red, and the huge body started to shake in a convulsion of mirth that rang deafeningly through the room.

"Forgive me," he managed to gasp at last. "Forgive me, my dear fellow. I was merely visualizing the scene in which you go to the authorities and tell them of the incredible demands put upon you by your employer."

"You must understand," said Mr. Crabtree; "I am not threatening you, Mr. Spelvin. It is only . . ."

"Threatening me? Mr. Crabtree, tell me, what connection do you think there is between us in the eyes of the world?"

"Connection? I work for you, Mr. Spelvin. I'm an employee here. I . . ."

Mr. Spelvin smiled blandly. "What a curious delusion," he said, "when one can see that you are merely a shabby little man engaged in some pitiful little enterprise that could not possibly be of interest to me."

"But you employed me yourself, Mr. Spelvin! I wrote a letter of application!"

"You did," said Mr. Spelvin, "but unfortunately the position was already filled, as I informed you in my very polite letter of explanation. You look incredulous, Mr. Crabtree, so let me inform you that your letter and a copy of my reply rest securely in my files should the matter ever be called to question."

"But this office! These furnishings! My subscriptions!"

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"Mr. Crabtree, Mr. Crabtree," said Mr. Spelvin shaking his head heavily, "did *you* ever question the source of your weekly income? The manager of this building, the dealers in supplies, the publishers who deliver their journals to you were no more interested in my identity than you were. It is, I grant, a bit irregular for me to deal exclusively in currency sent through the mails in your name, but have no fears for me, Mr. Crabtree. Prompt payments are the opiate of the businessman."

"But my reports!" said Mr. Crabtree who was seriously starting to doubt his own existence.

"To be sure, the reports. I daresay that the ingenious Mr. Crabtree, after receiving my unfavorable reply to his application, decided to go into business for himself. He thereupon instituted a service of financial reports and even attempted to make *me* one of his clients! I rebuffed him sharply I can tell you (I have his first report *and* a copy of my reply to it) but he foolishly persists in his efforts. Foolishly, I say, because his reports are absolutely useless to me; I have no interest in any of the corporations he discusses, and why he should imagine I would have is beyond my reckoning. Frankly, I suspect the man is an eccentric of the worst type, but since I have had dealings with many of that type I merely disregard him, and destroy his daily reports on their arrival."

"Destroy them?" said Mr. Crabtree stupefied.

"You have no cause for complaint, I hope," said Mr. Spelvin with some annoyance. "To find a man of your character, Mr. Crabtree, it was necessary for me to specify *hard work* in my advertisement. I am only living up to my part of the bargain in providing it, and I fail to see where the final disposition of it is any of your concern."

"A man of my character," echoed Mr. Crabtree helplessly, "to commit murder?"

"And why not?" The wide mouth tightened ominously. "Let me enlighten you, Mr. Crabtree. I have spent a pleasant and profitable share of my life in observing the human species, as a scientist might study insects under glass. And I have come to one conclusion, Mr. Crabtree, one above all others which has contributed to the making of my own success. I have come to the conclusion that to the majority of our species it is the function that is important, not the motives, nor the consequences.

"My advertisement, Mr. Crabtree, was calculated to enlist the services of one like that; a perfect representative of the type, in fact. From the moment you answered that advertisement to the present, you have been living up to all my expectations: you have been functioning flawlessly with no thought of either motive or consequence.

"Now murder has been made part of your function. I have honored you with an explanation of its motives; the consequences are clearly defined.

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Either you continue to function as you always have, or, to put it in a nutshell, you are out of a job."

"A job!" said Mr. Crabtree wildly. "What does a job matter to a man in prison! Or to a man being hanged!"

"Oh, come," remarked Mr. Spelvin placidly. "Do you think I'd lead you into a trap which might snare me as well? I am afraid you are being obtuse, my dear man. If you are not, you must realize clearly that my own security is tied in the same package as yours. And nothing less than your permanent presence in this office and your steadfast application to your work is the guarantee of that security."

"That may be easy to say when you're hiding under an assumed name," said Mr. Crabtree hollowly.

"I assure you, Mr. Crabtree, my position in the world is such that my identity can be unearthed with small effort. But I must also remind you that should you carry out my request you will then be a criminal and, consequently, very discreet.

"On the other hand, if you do not carry out my request — and you have complete freedom of choice in that — any charges you may bring against me will be dangerous only to you. The world, Mr. Crabtree, knows nothing about our relationship, and nothing about my affair with the gentleman who has been victimizing me and must now become my victim. Neither his demise nor your charges could ever touch me, Mr. Crabtree.

"Discovering my identity, as I said, would not be difficult. But using that information, Mr. Crabtree, can only lead you to a prison or an institution for the deranged."

Mr. Crabtree felt the last dregs of his strength seeping from him. "You have thought of everything," he said.

"Everything, Mr. Crabtree. When you entered my scheme of things, it was only to put my plan into operation; but long before that I was hard at work weighing, measuring, evaluating every step of that plan. For example, this room, this very room, has been chosen only after a long and weary search as perfect for my purpose. Its furnishings have been selected and arranged to further that purpose. How? Let me explain that.

"When you are seated at your desk, a visitor is confined to the space I now occupy at the window. The visitor is, of course, the gentleman in question. He will enter and stand here with the window *entirely open* behind him. He will ask you for an envelope a friend has left. This envelope," said Mr. Spelvin tossing one to the desk. "You will have the envelope in your desk, will find it, and hand it to him. Then, since he is a very methodical man (I have learned that well), he will place the envelope in the inside pocket of his jacket — and at that moment one good thrust will send him out the window. The entire operation should take less than a minute. "Immediately after that," Mr. Spelvin said calmly, "you will close the window to the bottom and return to your work."

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"Someone," whispered Mr. Crabtree, "the police . . ."

"Will find," said Mr. Spelvin, "the body of some poor unfortunate who climbed the stairs across the hallway and hurled himself from the roof above. And they will know this because inside that envelope secured in his pocket is not what the gentleman in question expects to find there, but a neatly typewritten note explaining the sad affair and its motives, an apology for any inconvenience caused (suicides are great ones for apologies, Mr. Crabtree) and a most pathetic plea for a quick and peaceful burial. And," said Mr. Spelvin, gently touching his fingertips together, "I do not doubt he will get it."

"What," Mr. Crabtree said, "what if something went wrong? If the man opened the letter when it was given to him. Or . . . if something like that happened?"

Mr. Spelvin shrugged. "In that case the gentleman in question would merely make his way off quietly and approach me directly about the matter. Realize, Mr. Crabtree, that anyone in my friend's line of work expects occasional little attempts like this, and, while he may not be inclined to think them amusing, he would hardly venture into some precipitous action that might kill the goose who lays the golden eggs. No, Mr. Crabtree, if such a possibility as you suggest comes to pass, it means only that I must reset my trap, and even more ingeniously."

Mr. Spelvin drew a heavy watch from his pocket, studied it, then replaced it carefully. "My time is growing short, Mr. Crabtree. It is not that I find your company wearing, but my man will be making his appearance shortly, and matters must be entirely in your hands at that time. All I require of you is this: when he arrives, the window will be open." Mr. Spelvin thrust it up hard and stood for a moment looking appreciatively at the drop below. "The envelope will be in your desk." He opened the drawer and dropped it in, then closed the drawer firmly. "And at the moment of decision, you are free to act one way or the other."

"Free?" said Mr. Crabtree. "You said he would ask for the envelope!"

"He will. He will, indeed. But if you indicate that you know nothing about it, he will quietly make his departure, and later communicate with me. And that will be, in effect, a notice of your resignation from my employ."

Mr. Spelvin went to the door and rested one hand on the knob. "However," he said, "if I do *not* hear from him, that will assure me that you have successfully completed your term of probation and are to be henceforth regarded as a capable and faithful employee."

"But the reports!" said Mr. Crabtree. "You destroy them . . ."

"Of course," said Mr. Spelvin, a little surprised. "But you will continue with your work and send the reports to me as you have always done. I assure you, it does not matter

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to me that they are meaningless, Mr. Crabtree. They are part of a pattern, and your adherence to that pattern, as I have already told you, is the best assurance of my own security."

The door opened, closed quietly, and Mr. Crabtree found himself alone in the room.

The shadow of the building opposite lay heavily on his desk. Mr. Crabtree looked at his watch, found himself unable to read it in the growing dimness of the room, and stood up to pull the cord of the light over his head. At that moment a peremptory knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Crabtree.

The door opened on two figures. One was a small, dapper man, the other a bulky police officer who loomed imposingly over his companion. The small man stepped into the office, and with the gesture of a magician pulling a rabbit from a hat, withdrew a large wallet from his pocket, snapped it open to show the gleam of a badge, closed it, and slid it back into his pocket.

"Police," said the man succinctly. "Name's Sharpe."

Mr. Crabtree nodded politely. "Yes?" he said.

"Hope you don't mind," said Sharpe briskly. "Just a few questions."

As if this were a cue, the large policeman came up with an efficient-looking notebook and the stub of a pencil, and stood there poised for action. Mr. Crabtree peered over his spectacles at the notebook, and through them at the diminutive Sharpe. "No," said Mr. Crabtree, "not at all."

"You're Crabtree?" said Sharpe, and Mr. Crabtree started, then remembered the name on the door.

"Yes," he said.

Sharpe's cold eyes flickered over him and then took in the room with a contemptuous glance. "This your office?"

"Yes," said Mr. Crabtree.

"You in it all afternoon?"

"Since one o'clock," said Mr. Crabtree. "I go to lunch at twelve and return at one promptly."

"I'll bet," said Sharpe, then nodded over his shoulder. "That door open any time this afternoon?"

"It's always closed while I am working," said Mr. Crabtree.

"Then you wouldn't be able to see anybody going up that stairs across the hall there."

"No," replied Mr. Crabtree, "I wouldn't."

Sharpe looked at the desk, then ran a reflective thumb along his jaw. "I guess you wouldn't be in a position to see anything happening outside the window either."

"No, indeed," said Mr. Crabtree. "Not while I'm at work."

"Now," said Sharpe, "did you *hear* something outside of that window this afternoon? Something out of the ordinary, I mean."

"Out of the ordinary?" repeated Mr. Crabtree vaguely.

"A yell. Somebody yelling. Anything like that?"

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Mr. Crabtree puckered his brow. "Why, yes," he said, "yes, I did. And not long ago either. It sounded as if someone had been startled — or frightened. Quite loud, too. It's always so quiet here I couldn't help hearing it."

Sharpe looked over his shoulder and nodded at the policeman who closed his notebook slowly. "That ties it up," said Sharpe. "The guy made the jump, and the second he did it he changed his mind, so he came down hollering all the way. Well," he said, turning to Mr. Crabtree in a burst of confidence, "I guess you've got a right to know what's going on here. About an hour ago some character jumped off that roof right over your head. Clear case of suicide, note in his pocket and everything, but we like to get all the facts we can."

"Do you know," said Mr. Crabtree, "who he was?"

Sharpe shrugged. "Another guy with too many troubles. Young, good-looking, pretty snappy dresser. Only thing beats me is why a guy who could afford to dress like that would figure he has more troubles than he can handle."

The policeman in uniform spoke for the first time. "That letter he left," he said deferentially, "sounds like he was a little crazy."

"You have to be a little crazy to take that way out," said Sharpe.

"You're a long time dead," said the policeman heavily.

Sharpe held the doorknob momentarily. "Sorry to bother you," he said to Mr. Crabtree, "but you know how it is. Anyhow, you're lucky in a way. Couple of girls downstairs saw him go by and passed right out." He winked as he closed the door behind him.

Mr. Crabtree stood looking at the closed door until the sound of heavy footsteps passed out of hearing. Then he seated himself in the chair and pulled himself closer to the desk. Some magazines and sheets of stationery lay there in mild disarray, and he arranged the magazines in a neat pile, stacking them so that all corners met precisely.

Mr. Crabtree picked up his pen, dipped it into the inkbottle, and steadied the paper before him with his other hand.

Efficiency Instruments, Ltd., he wrote carefully, *shows increased activity* . . .

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Have you ever wondered how a British detective-story writer would handle a typically American gangster situation?

Have you ever wondered how a British detective-story writer, without going overboard and without relaxing his grip on the literate English technique, would handle a typically hardboiled scene out of Hammett or Chandler?

Have you ever wondered how a British detective-story writer, without getting too rough or too tough, would treat violence and villainy, American style?

Peter Cheyney has written British versions of the American tough 'tec, but that isn't what we have in mind. The Cheyney imitations have been just that — unreasonable facsimiles. What we mean is guts-and-gore in the hands of a British classicist — guts and gore, but no gals; what we mean is hoodlum heroics, pretty boy pyrotechnics, not in terse imitation, but with an integrity all its own.

In other words, what a writer like Francis Iles, author of BEFORE THE FACT, *would do with three crooks holed up in a shabby tenement room, with the cops all around them ready to shoot it out . . .*

Three S's characterize the American tough 'tec — savagery, sex, and sophistication. Three S's characterize the British tough 'tec — it is softer, slower, and smoother. But the question remains: is it less realistic for a' that? In the final analysis, is the British species of shocker less penetrating, less effective? We leave it to you . . .

OUTSIDE THE LAW

by FRANCIS ILES

For a moment there was a tense silence in the shabby room.

Very cautiously Smith had drawn the window curtain a little farther aside as he continued to peer out from behind it into the street below. From the seat at the table Pat O'Donnell watched him in silence, his large mouth drooping open. Against the wall, where he had sprung at the first hint of danger, the lad Muller cowered, his heart beating furiously.

Then O'Donnell spoke. "Well?"

Smith turned slightly. "It's the busies," he announced, unemotionally. "They've found us."

Muller's heart gave a little jump, and his eyes flew to the pile of silver articles on the table. He knew little English, but already he had gathered that the word "busies" meant the police.

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"The divil they have. Would you believe that, now?" Pat O'Donnell was obviously trying to imitate Smith's calm.

He heaved his big frame out of the chair and crossed to the window. Smith made room for him to peep out.

"See that hound, skulking in the doorway? He's been there for the last hour or more. He's watching the house. I didn't tell you before because I wasn't sure. Now I am." Smith's pale, almost ascetic face seemed aflame; behind their pince-nez his slightly prominent, pale-blue eyes gleamed. The man seemed actually elated.

"And what makes ye sure now?"

"Because he nodded to a couple of the swine that went into the tobacconist's next door. And there's another couple turned up the mews. You can bet some have gone round the back, too. By cripes, there must be a dozen of 'em. We're surrounded."

"Houly Jakers!" O'Donnell's voice had a curious croak in it. "'Tis a bad business altogether."

In spite of his fear of Smith, Muller was unable to restrain the wail of terrified inquiry that rose to his lips. "Sur-rounded? *Ach, mein Gott, was ist denn los?*"

O'Donnell rounded on him fiercely. "Och, hould that foreign jabber!"

It was the fierceness of fear, but Muller did not know that. The tears started into his eyes. If Pat himself could speak to him like that, he was indeed forsaken.

"A dozen?" O'Donnell was muttering. "Why would they be sending a dozen, Smithy?"

"They know *me*," said Smith, with a curious pride.

"Ah, and me too." O'Donnell's voice seemed to suggest that he got some consolation from the fact. "But sure, 'tis a pity the stuff's here with us. That'll look bad now. We should have left it in the garridge at Aylsham."

"They know all about Aylsham," Smith returned, contemptuously. "They couldn't have traced us here without. You can bet they've got the car identified by now."

O'Donnell stared despondently down into the quiet street. "'Tis a bad lookout, entirely. Sure I don't know what we're to do now at all, the way you say the house is surrounded."

Smith's thin face flamed again. "By cripes, they haven't caught us yet!"

"Arrah, that's the boy. Sure, if anyone can get us out of it at all, it's you're the one with that same headpiece." He looked at the other hopefully.

"Let me think." Smith began to walk slowly up and down the little room, his head dropped on his chest.

From his place by the wall Muller watched him with terrified eyes. He was frightened, of course, of the detectives outside; but by now he was far, far more frightened of Smith. Smith was a devil: a cold, relentless fiend. Even now it made Muller feel quite sick to remember how coolly and readily Smith had shot last night at the man who had tried to bar their way.

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It was only by the mercy of heaven that the shot had missed and the policeman on that lonely road still lived.

Muller wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, furtively.

Why had he ever let himself get entangled with this terrible pair? And was it really only last night that Pat had come up to him in the street and drawn him, half-starved and cold as he was, into the warm public-house, and given him sausages and ham-rolls to eat and beer to drink, while he talked jovially of the fine job he had to offer and all the money that was to be earned for nothing at all, just nothing at all?

Muller had not understood a quarter of it all, but he had known at once that here was the finest, the noblest, the most wonderful man he had ever met. It had never occurred to him not to trust such a man. Even when, scared and incredulous two hours later, he understood at last the real nature of the job, it had been to Pat's entreaties, not to Smith's threats, that he acceded when, weak with fear, he climbed through the tiny window that would not admit even Smith's lean length, and opened the door from the inside.

That was how that pile of silver came to be lying on the table now. Muller knew that of that pile a certain proportion of the value had already been allotted, by Smith's cold justice, to himself. But he did not want it. He did not want anything now, except to get out of this dreadful house in safety and never to see either Smith or O'Donnell again.

Muller wiped his forehead again, and thought of sunny little Ehrensdorf on the Rhine, and of Lisa, who had so warmly approved his great plan to make his fortune in London. He had been mad to leave them both. London did not want German waiters. Would he ever see them again? He shivered. Muller was not brave.

Smith and O'Donnell were conferring now in low tones, and Pat was nodding his great head.

"Through the room to the left below," he nodded, "out of the window, drop into the yard, cross that and over the wall to the right into the timber yards, and then out through the main gates as bold as brass. I've got ye, Smithy, me boy. Sure, it's the great lad ye are. I never knew there was that way at all. And meself to go first all the way?"

"You first, then Muller, and I'll cover the rear. And you're responsible for him as well as yourself."

"Faith, that I'll be. Fritzy knows I wouldn't be leaving him in the lurch, don't ye, Fritzy?" At the prospect of escape the big man seemed to have thrown off his despondency. He grinned at Muller in quite the old way.

Muller tried to smile back, but his mouth felt stiff.

"Get on then, Pat," Smith said, impatiently.

O'Donnell tiptoed to the door. He opened it softly and peered down the stairs, then nodded over his

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shoulder. With a frightened glance Muller obeyed the wave of the revolver which had appeared in Smith's hand, and ranged himself behind Pat. His heart was thumping painfully, but it was with hope now. Smith was infallible: they were all going to escape; and in the confusion it would surely be easy to give the other two the slip, and then an honest job somewhere and no more of these horrors. In front of him Pat began to creep down the stairs.

Then everything seemed to happen at once.

There was a shout from O'Donnell. "There's one of 'em here. Back — get back!" He rushed back into the room, sweeping Muller and Smith with him, and slammed the door.

Smith turned on him angrily. "Why didn't you shoot, you fool? We could have got away. Now they're warned."

"Arrah, don't talk nonsense now," O'Donnell panted. "Wasn't it yourself said the house was surrounded?"

"We might have shot our way out if you'd had any guts. You've got your barker, haven't you?" O'Donnell pulled a revolver out of his pocket. "Well, why didn't you use it?"

"What, on that busy?"

"Of course on that busy."

"Och!" O'Donnell laughed uneasily. "Do ye not be talking foolish now, Smithy, boy. Ye know well enough ye'd not have used it yourself. Sure, 'twould be a hanging job for all of us if we did that. It's yerself knows they'd never let up on us if we shot a busy till they had us all hanged. Och, come now, I know what ye mean. 'Tis just frightening them with the barkers ye'd be, the way they'd let us get past and out of the window."

"Not much I wouldn't," Smith snarled. "If I use the barkers on those hounds, I shoot to kill."

O'Donnell's face fell ludicrously. "But 'tis madness. 'Tis hanging all of us ye'll be."

"Afraid, Pat?" Smith sneered.

"Faith, and 'tis you should know whether I'm afraid or not," O'Donnell answered, hotly. "I'm only telling you, 'tis madness to use the barkers like that. Maybe we'll get away now, or maybe we won't; but what's a few years out of your life compared with the losing of it altogether? Have sense, Smithy."

"Well, you can do as you like, but I'm not going to rot in jail." Smith's cold blue eyes were blazing now with the light of the fanatic. "I'll go to hell first — and I'll take a few of those swine with me, too."

O'Donnell turned away. "Ah, 'tis madness," he muttered. "But you'll have sense when it comes to the point."

Muller was crouching on the mattress in the corner of the room, his face stiff and his teeth chattering. The dreadful look on Smith's face would alone have been enough to terrify him; but in addition, the purport of the conversation he had just heard was only too plain. Smith

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meant to shoot at the police. If he did that, they would all be hanged. Muller began to pray desperately that somehow, by some miracle, Smith might die himself before he could shoot at the police.

Hardly two minutes had passed since the three of them had tumbled back into the room, but already O'Donnell was looking towards his leader in a pleading way.

"Come on then, Pat," Smith said, with a tight, almost contemptuous little smile. "I'm not done yet. If you're afraid to face up to the busy down there, I've another way over the roof — if you're not afraid of heights."

O'Donnell swallowed the insult without appearing to notice it. "There is? That's the great boy ye are. Show it me, and I'll hould us both on by the eyebrows, Fritzy and me."

"Come along, Muller," Smith ordered, curtly.

The courage of despair came to Muller's help. "*Nein, nein,*" he muttered brokenly. "*Ich kann nicht. Ich habe furcht.*"

"What's he say?" queried O'Donnell, suspiciously.

"He doesn't want to come."

"Och, listen now, Fritzy, boy. Sure, I wouldn't be ——"

"Never mind," Smith interrupted, impatiently. "If he won't come, we must leave him. He's had his chance. Come on."

Muller almost sobbed with joy. He was going to be left! The terrible Smith had relinquished him. Nothing mattered now.

Already the other two were moving towards the door. Smith's hand was actually stretched out towards the handle, when it began to rattle as if of its own accord; there was a bang on the further side of the door, and a gruff voice shouted:

"Open this door, in the name of the law."

There was a pause, while both men glided silently back.

Then the handle rattled again without result, for O'Donnell had turned the key in the lock three minutes ago, and the gruff voice repeated its demand.

Smith and O'Donnell looked at each other. Slowly Smith raised the revolver in his hand. Muller cowered on his mattress.

"Don't shoot, Smithy!" O'Donnell whispered, urgently. "'Tis madness. Ye know 'tis madness." But he made no effort to restrain the other by physical means.

Smith called out loudly. "Get away from that door, you, or I'll shoot."

O'Donnell's face looked ludicrous in its desperate anxiety. "Ye'll hang us all," he muttered. "Smithy!"

Muller crammed his knuckles into his mouth as he stared at the revolver, now pointing straight at the door. Wild ideas rushed into his mind of throwing himself on Smith; but the certainty that the revolver would be turned first on himself, kept him shivering, a collapsed heap, on the mattress.

The brief pause seemed to last for hours.

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Then the man on the other side of the door spoke again.

"Come on, Smith and O'Donnell. I want you."

Smith's hand made a tiny movement on the revolver. O'Donnell watched it motionless, as if hypnotized. Muller screamed. "*Nicht schiessen — nicht schiessen!*"

Smith fired.

There was a hoarse cry from the other side of the door; then a series of sickening, dull bumps on the stairs.

"*Du lieber Gott!*" Muller moaned.

O'Donnell's face was twitching. "Mother of God, have mercy on us," he muttered. "Ye've croaked him, Smithy."

"Yeah," Smith agreed, calmly. "I've croaked him. That's the first. By cripes, I'll show the hounds." He walked over to the window and looked out. "Not one of 'em in sight," he announced, with a kind of cold triumph. "That's given 'em something to think about."

"Well, we're in for it now," said O'Donnell, heavily. Neither of them took the least notice of Muller.

There was the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs.

"Is it croaking they *want?*" O'Donnell scowled. "Houly Jakers, then 'tis croaking they'll get."

"That's more like what I expected from you, Pat," Smith said, with a short laugh.

There was another bang on the door, another command to open.

"*Weg — weg!*" Muller shouted hysterically. "Go, or ——" He broke off abruptly as Smith's revolver menaced him, and crammed his knuckles back into his mouth.

"Come on, now. Open this door."

O'Donnell pushed Smith aside with a reckless laugh. "Faith, we can't be worse off than we are. This one's mine."

"*Ach, nein, nein,*" Muller moaned. "*Nicht schiessen!*"

O'Donnell fired all six cartridges, splintering the door in half a dozen places. But this time there was no cry.

"He stood aside," said Smith in a low voice.

There was the sound of stealthy footsteps, creeping downstairs.

Smith swore softly. "Out of the way, Pat."

He turned the key in the lock and whipped open the door, leaning round the jamb. Two shots sounded from his revolver. This time there did come a cry, and the sound of a heavy fall. Smith jumped back into the room and slammed the door.

"Got him on the run, the skunk."

"Smithy's the boy!" shouted O'Donnell, wildly.

"That'll keep 'em quiet for a bit," Smith said calmly.

The two men reloaded their weapons.

Shivering in his corner, Muller watched them. He dared not speak, he hardly dared move. For both the men had gone mad now. They had killed, and the dreadful joy of killing was upon them. Smith, the true criminal, the fanatical enemy of

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organized society, showed it only by the almost insane light in his blazing, pale-blue eyes. O'Donnell, with his ape-like face and uncouth frame, had simply reverted to the primitive. Smith would kill as precisely and carefully as he brushed the neat blue serge suit he wore. O'Donnell would go ecstatically berserk. But either of them, Muller was convinced, might turn at any moment and put a casual bullet into himself.

O'Donnell waved his re-loaded revolver round his head with a great shout. "What'll we do now, Smithy, boy? Just say the word. 'Tis aching I am for another shot at the craitures."

"We'll try the roof again," Smith replied.

"The roof it is! And let them not be trying to stop us this time, or 'twill be the worse for someone. Lead on, boy."

Smith opened the door, and the two men disappeared.

Muller gave a great sob of relief. They had not even glanced at him. They had forgotten all about him. Let them but get on the roof, or anywhere, and he could escape at last. He crept over to the door.

The next instant there came the sound of a shot, and then of several shots. Muller fled back to his corner as Smith and O'Donnell tumbled back into the room and slammed the door.

"Well, and would ye believe the likes of that, now?" O'Donnell was saying, in high indignation. "Shooting at us, the murdering devils! 'Tis a dirty thing to do, that."

Smith was breathing quickly, his eyes blazing.

"By cripes, I'll show them," he panted. "They don't know who they're up against yet. Pat, look after the stairs."

"Sure, I'll shoot the nose off anyone who pokes it round the bend," shouted O'Donnell. He took up his position in the doorway. "What'll ye be after doing, Smithy, me pretty boy?"

"I'll take on the swine in the street." Smith was crouching by the window, waiting for a target.

For a minute or two there was silence, broken only by O'Donnell's heavy breathing and the shuddering sobs which Muller, for all his efforts, could not suppress. From Smith came no sound or movement. With his revolver-muzzle resting in the two or three inches of space at the bottom of the slightly opened window, he was patiently waiting to kill.

He fired a shot, and swore briefly. "Missed him, by cripes!"

There was another pause, and then another shot which was followed by the sharp splintering of glass.

"Faith!" O'Donnell exclaimed. "That was never you, boy?"

"No. They're firing at us now, from the house opposite."

"Do ye tell me that now? Let them then, the dirty skunks. And a fine chance they have of hitting us."

"Wait till I see which window they're at," Smith muttered.

Another shot crashed through the glass of the window, causing Muller

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to duck in his corner with a little cry of terror.

Smith had not flinched, though the bullet passed only just over his head. He fired six shots in quick succession, and there followed them the faint noise of glass tinkling on the pavement.

"Any luck, Smithy?" O'Donnell asked, eagerly.

"Don't know. I saw which window they're using. There's not much of it left now." Smith's voice was deadly in its level coolness. He dropped his emptied revolver on the floor and took another from his pocket.

"That's the great boy," rejoined O'Donnell with enthusiasm. "Arrah," he shouted down the stairs, "come on, the lot of you. Quit skulking, and let me shoot the noses off your ugly mugs."

A voice answered from the landing below. "Throw that gun away and come down. You've still got a chance, O'Donnell. We know it wasn't you who did the croaking. Better save your neck while you can. We're bound to get you and Smith later or sooner, and this game won't help you much then. Don't be a fool".

"Faith, and 'tis yourself's the fool if it's thinking ye are ye can take me in with that kind of talk," O'Donnell roared. "Just come round the corner and give me the pleasure of shooting the ugly face off ye."

"You throw that gun down the stairs and follow it yourself, and I'll promise to do my best for you later. That's straight."

O'Donnell winked hugely at Smith. "And will ye do the best ye can for me pal, too?"

"For Smith? No, I'm sorry. He's gone too far."

"Has he, then? Well, listen now, Mr. Skulking Busy. I'm going with him. Ye'll get us both, or ye'll get neither."

This time there was no answer from below.

Smith smiled tightly. "That's the great chap ye are, Pat," he mimicked.

O'Donnell flushed like a girl. "Faith, I wouldn't be giving ye up for the likes of those craitures, Smithy, boy," he mumbled, and to relieve his feelings discharged a volley down the stairs.

Almost at the same moment Smith's revolver cracked.

He laughed shortly. "Made him jump, by cripes. Pat, come here a second."

O'Donnell ran across lightly and crouched by the other.

Smith gestured towards the end of the street. The pride was obvious in his voice. "See that crowd? There's a dozen busies there and more, not counting the ones we can't see. We're giving the hounds something to think about."

"And we'll give 'em more yet," O'Donnell rejoined, warmly. "Sure, 'tis a great fight." He hurried back to his post.

As he was crossing the room Smith, without turning his head, said:

"Muller, or whatever your name is, come here and load for me." He

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pulled a handful of ammunition out of his pocket and dropped it on the floor beside the empty revolver.

Muller dared not refuse. On shaking limbs he dragged himself across the room. Hardly was he out of the shelter of his corner when another shot, crashing through the window, buried itself in the ceiling. He jumped back, with a cry of fear.

Smith turned on him savagely. "What the hell's the matter with you? Missed you by yards. Come on, you white-livered. . . ."

On his hands and knees Muller crawled across the room and with shaking fingers began to load the empty revolver.

Smith fired again.

"Got him!" he exclaimed. "Knocked him clean over in the road. Cripes, he's moving. Try to crawl away, would you?"

"*Ach, Gott, nein!*" shuddered Muller as Smith, with deliberate callousness, emptied his revolver at the wounded man below.

"Will they be bringing the sojers, Smithy, boy?" shouted O'Donnell. "Ah, would ye, now?" Six shots came in rapid succession from the doorway. "Arrah, up the rebels!"

His eyes still on the road, Smith stretched out an imperative hand for the other revolver; but with a convulsive jump Muller leaped backwards and stood upright, clutching it.

"*Nein!*" he cried, wildly. "*Nein*, I give it you not!"

Smith turned his head and stared at Muller. The boy quailed before the cold ferocity in the blue eyes, but desperation stiffened him. He knew, too, that if he gave the gun back now, its first bullet would be for himself.

Smith rose. "Give me that gun, you little scum, or. . . ."

Muller retreated two more steps. The revolver in his hand was pointed at Smith now, waveringly but unmistakably.

"*Nein, ich geb' es nicht*," he sobbed hysterically. "You have killed enough mans. *Nein, zurück, sonst.* . . . Go away from me, or I shoot you!"

Smith took a resolute stride. "Give me that gun, or ——"

"*Ich schiesse!*" Muller shrieked. "I shoot!" From the doorway O'Donnell watched in amazement.

In spite of himself Smith halted. "Oh, very well," he said, and stooped towards the empty revolver on the floor.

"*Nein!* Leave alone that barker."

Smith looked angrily at O'Donnell. "Plug the little rat."

"Faith, me own gun's empty," said O'Donnell, deprecatingly.

"Then load it, you fool."

"No!" said Muller, with a little gasp. "You not load it."

The revolver wavered towards him, and O'Donnell hesitated.

"Well, what do ye want, Fritzy?" he asked, ingratiatingly. "Sure, you wouldn't plug Smithy or me, the way we're your pals and all. Tell Pat what it is you want, now?"

"I want to go away," Muller said, wildly. "Let me go, please."

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"Oh, load up and plug him," Smith shouted. "They'll be on us in a minute, else."

"No, no, I plug you first, Pat. Please to turn round."

"Faith, I believe he would, too," muttered O'Donnell, and turned half round.

For an instant the three were motionless, like a waxwork tableau: O'Donnell turned sideways in the doorway, Smith by the window bending a little forward as if to spring, Muller by the farther wall, white with terror and desperation, not knowing how to control the situation which he himself had brought about.

For a second they remained so. Then Smith sprang.

There was a shot, and Smith dropped to the floor. How Muller's fingers had tightened on the trigger he hardly knew. The action had been purely instinctive; but it had been very effective.

O'Donnell seemed momentarily stupefied. Then he shouted a furious oath. "Houly Jakers! Ye — ye've croaked him."

"Yes," Muller agreed. "I've croaked him." Curiously, he felt quite calm now, and not at all afraid of O'Donnell. "Now I go, please."

"Ye'll go, ye murdering little spalpeen?" shouted O'Donnell in rage. "Ye think I'll let ye go, when ye've just croaked the finest man that ever walked this earth? I'll show ye."

"Then I croak you too. If you come near to me, I shoot you. Throw your barker at the floor, please."

For a second O'Donnell struggled with his courage. But the new resolution which seemed to have taken possession of Muller decided him. Sullenly he let his revolver drop to the floor.

"So!" said Muller, without emotion. "Now go backwards."

O'Donnell, under the muzzle of the gun which had just killed his leader, backed on to the landing. Muller picked up the two empty revolvers.

"What do ye want to do with them?" O'Donnell asked, sulkily.

"I throw them out of the window. You have killed enough mans. You kill no more. Then I go."

"Ah, come now, Fritzy boy, ye wouldn't do a thing like that," O'Donnell whined. "Do ye not be throwing them barkers away. Sure, go if ye want to: I wouldn't be stopping ye. But leave me the barkers, else the busies will get me for sure."

"*Das ist mir gleich.*" Muller walked to the window.

Something made him glance over his shoulder. O'Donnell was running silently after him. Without hesitation Muller fired.

Muller hardly stopped to glance at O'Donnell's huge body sprawled across Smith's. His calm had been a false one. Now that the necessity for it had gone, hysteria rapidly supervened. His one frantic idea now was to get out of that terrible room. The smoking revolver still in his hand, he rushed down the stairs.

His brain, numbed by terror, had

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hardly registered the fact that he had killed two men. All he knew was that he was free again at last: free from Smith, free from the police. For he had done the job of the police for them.

He rushed out on to the front step and exultantly waved his revolver to his friends the police, to summon them to see the great thing he had done for them.

The shot took him through the throat.

As he crumpled up, Muller's face took on an expression of great surprise. Why had his friends the police shot him, after all he had done for them?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Walter D. Edmonds has said in print that his writing "is not 'significant'," and that he "belongs to no cliques." Not many literary commentators would quarrel with the second statement: no one else writes quite like Mr. Edmonds. But not many critics would accept the first statement without first insisting on a definition of terms. The word "significant" may mean different things to different people, but few critics would deny Mr. Edmonds his high place among contemporary American novelists.*

The Erie Canal — its beginnings and its heyday — the boats and the songs and the taverns and the epic brawls — the boatmen and the trappers and the farmers and the fine-feathered passengers who gave it vivid color — and, above all, the glorious countryside through which the Canal snaked its way — all this is Mr. Edmonds's special bailiwick, and you know from the first word on the first page that Mr. Edmonds knows this land and its history, and loves them both. ROME HAUL *came first, and from this novel Marc Connelly fashioned that memorable play, "The Farmer Takes a Wife"; then* THE BIG BARN, ERIE WATER, *and later* DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK *and* CHAD HANNA. *No, Mr. Edmonds does not belong to any clique: he has his own special literary province, and it is part and parcel of the whole, rich, authentic, teeming American scene.*

ABOUT THE STORY: *The plot idea of "An Honest Deal" came out of conversations between Mr. Edmonds and his friends in Boonville, New York (Mr. Edmonds's birthplace). The story of "this strictly honest job of horse trading" first appeared in the "Atlantic Monthly," and only after publication was it discovered that the basic conception goes far back into the mists of folklore. Indeed, one scholarly gentleman informed Ellery Sedgwick, then editor of the "Atlantic," that the same tale was a favorite yarn among Arab horse-swapping experts even before the birth of Christ. Nevertheless, we are quite certain that most of you will find "this happy scheme" a new wrinkle on an old dodge, and Mr. Edmonds's Black River version of legendary stature.*

AN HONEST DEAL

by WALTER D. EDMONDS

"THERE she is," said I. Finis Wilson, with a wave of his hand toward the mare standing at his side. "Gentle, kind, the ideal horse."

He ran his hand all over her, slapping her. "One hundred and thirty

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dollars, cash. I paid a hundred and ten for her."

The active little farmer looked her over for the seventh time, walked twice around her nervously, and asked, almost hopefully, "She ain't scared of the cars, you say?"

"No," said Mr. Wilson. "As far as the cars is concerned, she'd go to sleep with her tail on the rail. Wouldn't she, George?"

George was Finis Wilson's forty-year-old stableboy. He lifted a pair of soupy eyes from where he sat on a bucket and said, "Guess that's right."

"Sure," said Finis Wilson, "it's right."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the farmer, looking more worried as he fingered some bills in his pocket. "I'm aiming to use her hauling milk."

A wide grin overspread Mr. Wilson's thin features. He pulled the ends of his pale mustache together over his chin, then poked the farmer confidentially between the ribs.

"For a milk horse," he remarked, "that mare can do about everything but milk the cows."

The farmer thought a moment. "Make it a hundred," he suggested with the air of a man with bold decisions in his head.

"Sold!"

Mr. Wilson stretched out a long arm. The farmer counted the money into his palm, wetting his thumb and forefinger to feel each bill.

"I'll hitch her onto the back of your wagon," said Mr. Wilson.

The farmer climbed aboard and started his heavy team, and the thin mare shuffled off lazily behind.

Leaning against the barn, Mr. Wilson watched them disappear.

"George," he observed in his mild voice, "there was a sale."

"I guess that's right," said George.

"You was a witness," said Mr. Wilson. "I was strictly honest."

"How about what she done at the depot?" asked the stableboy. He made a thrust with the dungfork with which he had emerged from the barn. Following the gesture, Finis Wilson saw a pair of wheels and splintered shafts piled up on a battered wagon box that lacked a spring and the rear axle.

"George, you'd ought to pay more attention" — he shook his head sombrely — "or you won't never get to be a horse dealer. It was the engine give her that idee."

George set down the dungfork in order to scratch his head.

"I guess that's right, Mr. Wilson."

"It's a sensitive point, George; but if he gives her time she may outgrow even that notion about the engine."

"Yeanh."

"It was an honest deal," said Mr. Wilson. "I always make an honest deal, George, and if you paid more attention you'd see how I do it and you'd maybe be a successful horse trader yourself when you get to be a man. I've always been honest in trading. Of course, a man can make a little here and a little there by lying and cheating, but that's only small money. He's got to be honest to make

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a big profit. I'm honest, George. I've never been cheated in a trade to my knowledge. And no man has ever got the law onto me, either."

He slowly pulled the back of his hand across his lips, and a look of sadness crept into his eyes.

"Oncet in a while," he went on, "it's natural that a man don't understand me. The man that bought that black bitch just now may be one of them. But that's what an honest man has got to expect. I've found that out, and I'll tell you why it is, George. It's because the horse himself is the sensitive point in a deal."

"Yeanh," said George, "I guess that's right."

He stood awhile staring after the thin stooped shoulders disappearing up the alley. Then he picked up the dungfork and flung its contents on the barnyard heap.

"I don't know a great lot," he observed to himself in a puzzled way, "but I'm real glad that's the last of *her*."

If horse traders have a reputation for being indolent men it is probably because they are constantly overworking their imaginations. I. Finis Wilson was most familiar to his neighbors in the town of Ava, New York, when they saw him sitting on the porch of Mrs. Edna Brown's hotel, his cowhide boots on the rail and his head lolling against the back of the rocking chair.

The hotel stood on the main street, which was an enlargement of the highway to Rome, and the porch offered him a perfect observation post from which to watch for strange horses entering the county. It was Finis Wilson's serious statement and pride that no horse had lived and died in upper Oneida County without having passed at least once through his barn on the wings of profit.

On the hotel porch Finis nodded to one or two of the boarders and sat down to spend an hour till supper in pleasant meditation on the departure of the black mare. The stout man on his right spat leisurely into the ear of an open nasturtium and remarked, "I seen Whiter driving out with that black mare."

"Yeanh."

"Yeanh."

The man saw no chance of securing figures, so he settled himself to a comfortable enjoyment of the shade and the slight breeze. The hum of bees in the nasturtium vines was lulling. He folded his hands over his paunch and gently rocked himself. Then, without warning, an idea occurred to him.

"Jeepers!" he exclaimed.

"Yeanh?"

"Did you see the mare the doctor drove in with this morning?"

Finis glanced sideways over his thin nose. "No," he said.

"There's a horse!"

"Yeanh?"

"Oh, gol! She's pretty."

Finis grunted.

"She's a dandy animal. He got her from a feller in Frankfort."

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"Yeanh?"

"She's got quite a record for speed down there. She looks it. Bright bay. Bet she's a Morgan."

"Yeanh? There's quite a few breeds you see that color in."

The stout man was annoyed and blew out his cheeks, remarking, "Well, Finis, you'll have to look her over probably; but I hear she ain't for sale."

"Yeanh."

"It's too bad you didn't get the first profit onto her yourself," said the stout man.

Finis did not answer this. He removed his feet from the rail and ambled inside after his supper.

The stout man still looked annoyed. He turned to the traveling polish salesman.

"I'd hate to be the doctor," he said. "Once Finis sees that mare that doctor won't have no peace. It's too bad, at that. He's a nice boy; but he's just out of Harvard College, and doctors ain't got much sense in a money deal, anyhow."

The vendor of polishes puffed out his chest.

"I'm a pretty good hand at judging a man," he said, "and I shouldn't think your doctor would have much to worry about getting cheated by that thin hayseed, if he's the one you're talking about."

The fat lids of the other's eyes seemed slowly to congeal as he gave the toes of his boots a noncommittal scrutiny.

"Well, maybe you're right, at that. Finis didn't go to no college; but he's never been cheated in a deal and he says he's never done no cheating into a deal, to the best of his knowledge. But then he's an ignorant man. Finis is kind of slow."

"Sure," said the salesman, affably. "Just what I said."

"Course Finis ain't got much polish," the fat man went on as if to himself, "but he always was kind of cute. He started out when he was thirteen. He took and sold Riddle's gray mare out of Riddle's back pasture lot to a bunch of gypsies for eighty dollars. Then he went around to Riddle with the money and bought that mare for twenty-five dollars. Riddle never went into the back lot to see if she was there. Finis knowed so much about her, he was glad to get that much. Nobody wouldn't have known a thing about it if them gypsies hadn't come back the next week hollering that they'd been cheated into buying a mare with the cold spavin for eighty dollars. That's how Finis has always done. He's kind of slow, so he aims to keep ahead of the other feller. But even then it was a fair deal, except for the gypsies, and we run them out of town."

The salesman shifted the conversation.

"Funny name he's got. What did you say it was?"

The stout man unfolded his hands from his belly.

"I. Finis Wilson," he said dryly. "I. for Ira. His pa named him that after himself. He was his fourteenth

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child. His ma give him the other name."

When Finis Wilson emerged from supper to take his seat again on the porch in the cool of the evening he was meditating on the stout man's description of the doctor's new mare. Before he could actually sit down a thud of hoofs and a rattle of spokes sounded down the street and the doctor flashed past in his surrey, driving his regular horse — one that Finis had sold him when he first came to Ava in the spring. It had been a good sale, Finis remembered, but he had not made as large a profit as he might have, for he knew that most doctors needed two horses and he intended to preserve his patronage for the second also. Besides, the doctor had seemed too much of a nice boy, and was so frankly unaccustomed to horses that Finis had not found it in his heart to disillusion him in the first deal.

"We'll coax him a bit," he had said to George, "and gentle him some."

Finis watched the doctor out of sight. It occurred to him that his absence would afford a first-rate opportunity to examine the mare freely and see how well founded the stout man's enthusiasm had been.

He made his way slowly down the street. Twilight had come in about the trunks of the overarching elms with a touch of dew and a scent of meadows visible between the houses. Finis, strolling along with his hands in his pockets, nodded every now and then to villagers taking their ease on their front porches. At the corner of the doctor's cottage he paused to cut himself a chew. Having stowed it outside of his right molars, he wiped his lips with the back of his thumb, jerked the ends of his mustache, and disappeared behind the house.

In front of the stable door he found William Dewey, the doctor's man, polishing a new light single harness, whistling the while monotonously on three notes. Finis thought he was rubbing with unwonted enthusiasm. He leaned himself against the door-frame and crossed one leg before the other.

"Ain't seen you show so much grit at a job in a long while, Bill," he observed.

"Got to have a smart harness for a smart mare, Finis."

Bill breathed on the check buckle and rubbed it tenderly with his handkerchief. "Genuine sterling plate on them buckles, Finis. Doc bought it particular for his new mare."

"Yeanh, I heard he'd picked up a new horse somewheres. What's she like?"

"Like? Say, there ain't a horse in seven counties can touch her. She's won in Whitesboro every year for five. She's a genuine pure-bred Morgan. You could trade all the brutes you got in your barn, Finis, all for one horse, and I bet even you couldn't get a value equal to her."

"I been hearing she's fair to middling," Finis said.

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"You don't believe it, by cripus, but I'll fetch her out."

"Don't take the bother," said Finis politely, but his long nose twitched and a tingling came under the skin between his shoulders.

"No bother," said Bill from within the barn, with the note of a man who is willing to convince a friend of his stupidity.

Finis heard the light, quick steps of a horse affably backing out of a stall and approaching the door, but he managed to preserve his casual pose. Then a bright head came forth and the short ears pricked at him, and he saw her take a breath of his scent. In spite of himself, one hand came out of his pocket to stroke the delicate nostrils. It seemed to Finis that he had never come to a quicker understanding with a mare, and he began to realize that the doctor wasn't her natural owner.

But Bill pushed himself importantly between them and, taking the lead rope close to the halter, brought her out into the open. She was all Morgan, wide-chested, a hint of Arab about her head, high-crested, straight-legged, full-quartered. Finis felt cold little ripples of excitement doing circus acts with his heart. One look and she filled his eyes. It gave him genuine pain to know that she wasn't his. As Bill trotted her round in significant silence, Finis's hand came up and his lips ran over her good points as if to a buyer; his hand reached behind him for his showing whip. To sell such a horse would be a fitting climax to his long career. He saw himself at the Syracuse Fair turning down eight-hundred-dollar bids; he saw himself in a frock coat and yellow boots and a new gray hat; he heard comment about her on all sides, and his own voice saying, "Northern bred, mister. On my own farm. Four years old and a daisy. Ask anybody that comes from Ava." And all the time, too, he realized that she belonged to a college-bred doctor, no more than a boy, who had pink cheeks and next to no knowledge of the world and horses. If he had been a philosopher, he would have doubted God's existence; being Finis Wilson, he knew that it wasn't right and that he would have to do something about it.

So he said in his mild voice, "She's a pretty clever buggy proposition at that, Bill."

Bill came to a dead stop.

"Buggy proposition! I thought you knowed a horse!"

"Yeanh. Don't take it hard, Bill. She's past twelve. Let me look at her mouth. Get a lantern."

Bill sent a shuddering spit directly for the toes of Finis's boots, and led the mare into the barn without a word.

"You oughtn't to take it so hard, Bill."

"Twelve!" Bill's voice came cavernously from the barn. "She's rising five. Doc's uncle raised her on his own place."

"Well, a man's relative is apt to make that kind of a mistake in a gift."

Bill came out of the barn with a

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lantern and resumed his work on the harness. He kept a scornful silence, and after a few remarks Finis moseyed away to the main street.

He stopped to look in at the string of horses in his barn and said, "Trash!" bitterly.

His stableboy lifted his head out of the corner manger and looked at him sleepily.

"I guess that's right, Mr. Wilson."

"You shut up!" said Finis, with unexpected savageness.

If ever Finis Wilson desired anything in his life, it was the doctor's mare. He dreamed about her that night, and the first thing he saw in the morning after breakfast was the doctor driving her out of town on a distant call. The rate at which she took him past brought a grunt of admiration up out of the stout man.

"Didn't I tell you?" he demanded triumphantly of Finis.

Finis declined to answer.

"Something's soured into him," the stout man soliloquized aloud. "He'd ought to see the doctor."

He sat down and said to himself that it was too bad the doctor wasn't a sharper man.

But Finis went on to his barn, where he put George through three hours of misery at cleaning the stable. For his own occupation he sat on the grain bin in search of ideas. Little by little these settled in his stomach, and before dinner time Finis had acquired quite a pain. So he went round to the doctor's cottage. There was a string beside the door which he pulled, and a bell rang loudly just over his head. At the same moment the doctor himself opened the door.

"I saw you through the window," he explained. "Come in."

He led Finis into his consulting room. He was a young man with fresh-colored skin and inexperienced eyes. Finis peered up at him shrewdly from under his hat brim.

"Sit down," said the doctor.

"I don't know that it's serious, Doc. It's just that my dinner ain't been setting so good lately."

"Let's see your tongue," said the doctor. He had learned that his patients expected all the rituals of his office, and as a matter of fact they were as pleased to see the diploma framed on the wall as he was himself.

As long as he would have to pay, Finis extracted the last atom of service, pulse taking, thermometer, and all, and carefully pocketed the doctor's pills. Then, as a natural thing, he brought the conversation round to the mare.

"She's a likely-looking buggy horse," he said grudgingly. "I'm wondering if you and me couldn't make a deal onto her."

"Why, I don't know, Finis. I hadn't thought of selling her. You see, she was a gift. My uncle gave her to me for a wedding present."

Finis was properly startled.

"Yes," said the doctor. "I'm going out to Indiana next month to get married. I'd have gone out this spring, only I didn't have the money

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to. I've got enough now, though not much for a honeymoon."

He smiled, and blushed.

"Well, by gol, that's fine," said Finis. Then a sly look came into his eyes. "I'd give you two hundred dollars for that mare. That would give you quite a trip, now."

"Well, you know what she's worth, I guess. But I couldn't sell her. I wouldn't want to."

"I'll make it two-fifty, between friends, and I'll find you another horse, cheap," Finis offered.

The doctor appeared lost in thought. If he had felt Finis's pulse at that moment he would have been professionally alarmed. But the thin dealer's only sign of excitement was the twisting of the ends of his long pale mustache together over his chin.

The doctor looked up.

"No, Finis, she's not for sale. She's too near the perfect horse for my work, though I guess she wouldn't go far outside of it."

"That's right, but she's kind of a clever article, you know."

"Just the same, I couldn't. Take two of those pills after every meal. They're a kind of physic. And they'll touch up your liver. Come around again in a day or two."

Finis sighed, paid, and went out. He made his way to his barn, where he found George feeding the horses their noon grain.

"George," he asked, "have you looked at that mare the doctor's got?"

"Yeanh."

"What do you think of her?"

"Well, she's kind of pretty," said George, trying to imitate his employer's accustomed manner.

"Kind of pretty! You poor, abandoned twerp. That mare's the finest piece of horse meat I've seen in this county in twenty years."

"Yeanh," George said meekly. "I guess that's right."

"Here," said Finis, suddenly taking the pill box from his pocket, "eat them. I just bought them off Doc and there ain't no point in throwing them away. They're good for the liver."

"Thanks," said George. Finis sat down on a box and filled an old corncob.

"George, I'd give a lot to buy that mare, but the danged fool won't sell. I offered him a good price, at that. What can a man do to buy a horse from a man that don't want to sell?"

"Give him some more money," said George.

"You shut up!" said Finis.

It was the source of infinite sorrow to Finis Wilson that George appeared to have offered the only possible way to deal with the doctor. But in the succeeding weeks he raised his price to four hundred dollars, with no effect. Two days later he had called at the doctor's office and narrated George's symptoms as his own. Since George had eaten all the pills at once, the symptoms were sufficiently peculiar to warrant Finis's appearance for several times more. "I feel like a horse taking a heavy load downhill on a high breeching. I can't get no com-

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fort no more." It occurred to him that the symptoms also described his own state of mind.

But the doctor, while he retained his interest in Finis's digestion, would have none of the deal. "If he wasn't such a danged fool," Finis complained, "he'd see I was offering him more than the mare is worth."

Finally Finis lost all sense of balance. He stopped the doctor in the middle of the main street as he was returning from a Sunday afternoon call, driving his old horse, and he said, "Doc, I honestly make you my last offer for that mare. I'll pay you five hundred dollars down for her — just as she is. Spot cash for the mare alone. You're leaving to go West for your wife, ain't you?"

The doctor drew a long breath. Five hundred dollars would not only furnish a honeymoon; there would be enough remaining to furnish the upstairs bedroom he had been writing Ermintrude about, which by correspondence they had planned in complete detail. But he preserved his presence of mind.

"Yes, I'm leaving on the evening train. I'll be walking down to the depot, Finis, and I'll let you know once for all then."

"I'll be on the hotel porch, Doc. I'll have the money in my pants pocket."

A great calm had settled over Finis's mind. He had tendered his limit — there was no more for him to do. As for the doctor, he drove slowly home. . . .

Now the doctor was very young, and perhaps he may be excused when it is remembered that a country practice, while more highly considered in the old days than it is now, did not bring in a great deal of money for the luxuries of life. Further, it must be remembered that the doctor was dealing with the slyest man in seven counties, according to repute. And third, and perhaps most important, was a point that even Finis had overlooked. Though he was practicing in a village in upstate New York, and though he was planning to marry an Indiana girl, the doctor's blood was of the Yankiest New England strains. He came from Sandwich; and his name was Nickerson. This as a preliminary to destiny. . . .

As he turned into his yard, he looked at his watch and saw that he had an hour till train time. As he got down over the wheel, he made up his mind that he would not sell the mare — even for five hundred dollars. He was so relieved to have reached this decision that his faculties cleared from their dazzlement, and he became aware of his man, Bill, tears streaming from his eyes and strange noises issuing from his mouth.

"Cholera," was the doctor's first thought. "Liquor," his second. The third was a flash of fate. "The mare."

"Bill!"

Bill stared at him dimly. "She's just fetched her last kick," he said.

"What's the matter?"

"I come in after dinner and there she lay as big as a elephant that's

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going to litter," groaned Bill. "She'd got loose some way. She'd got her head in the grain bin and filled herself bowdacious full, and there she was kicking like a steam engine and roaring like Niagara Falls. I got a pill into her, but it was too late. I done the best I could, Doc, honest. But it weren't no good at all."

The doctor looked in without a word and saw his mare on her back, all four legs in the air. It was all he needed to see. Though he was not much of a horseman, he began to appreciate the genuineness of Bill's sorrow when the latter said, "I been mighty close to prayer, Doc."

The doctor was dazed again, as if the five hundred dollars had bludgeoned him between the eyes. If he had only closed with Finis, he saw that the sorrow might still have been theirs, but the grief would have been the dealer's.

Then a light came to him, or it may have been the resurgence of the good New England blood that pioneered this great land of ours.

He clapped Bill painfully on the shoulder.

"Listen here, Bill. Borrow Mr. Smith's stone boat and his big team, and right after dark you take her round to Finis Wilson's. I'm leaving in three-quarters of an hour for Indiana. I'm going to strike a deal with him."

All the world loves a horse, but there is no one in the world at all who doesn't like even better to see a horse dealer trimmed and shaved. Bill looked as if he had been shown the way to hope.

"All right, Doc."

With one eye on the clock and the other on the window, the doctor packed his carpetbags with wedding clothes. It was getting late, and a shower that had been promising for some time was obscuring the sunset. By the time he reached the station it would be really dark.

He took up his bags and walked swiftly along the main street. Lights from the hotel windows showed Finis sitting on the steps. He got up.

"Doc?" he said. There was the hint of a quaver in his voice.

The doctor spoke like a man who has reached a decision against his better judgment.

"I've decided to let you have her, Finis. She's yours for five hundred."

Finis handed a wad of bills to the doctor, who counted them carefully in the dim light.

"I'm an honest man," said Finis in a pained manner.

"It's best to be business-like," said the young doctor; "it saves misunderstandings. I've told Bill to take the mare around to your barn in half an hour."

"Good," said Finis. "I'd thought to fetch her myself, but I guess it'll be better waiting for her. More exciting, so to speak."

He held out his hand, and, though his back was to the light, the doctor felt a twinge to see so plainly joy unalloyed on his thin face.

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"Shake, Doc," said Finis. "And I'd take it kindly you and Bill wouldn't say nothing about this deal for a while."

"I won't," the doctor promised. "I'll be gone for a week."

The train whistled for the above-town crossing, and the doctor sprinted for the station.

Finis watched his fluttering coat-tails, and he grinned and grinned. Then he took his own way to his stable. He went leisurely, drawing out his expectation to the last drop. If the doctor had been a keen man, he said to himself, he would have waited for another hundred dollars.

And Finis knew that the hundred dollars would have been forthcoming.

"Well, George," he said to his henchman, "how be you?"

George got feebly up from his bed in the manger and rubbed his eyes.

"Not very good, Mr. Wilson. Some way I ain't been right since my inwards got a hold on them pills."

"Cheer up and feel better," said Finis with surprising boisterousness. "Tonight I bought the doctor's mare. Here's a dollar for you to feel better on."

"Thanks," said George. "Shall I go fetch her?"

"She's to be delivered. Fix some straw in that box stall."

George got up and spread some bedding. It was hard for Finis to sit still, and in spite of himself he was unable to keep his eyes from the door. After a while George sat beside him. They said nothing, but the light of the lantern at their feet showed both their heads turned left and both jaws motionless to listen, and up above in the brown dark of the mow their great shadows also listened. Only Finis's hand was twisting together the ends of his long pale mustache.

"There's a stone boat coming down the alley," said George.

"What ——"

Finis awoke like a shot to impending disaster. It was revealed to him in the form of Bill, a heavy team, and the four stiff legs of the mare, pointed to the single star showing dimly through the clouds.

Finis came to his feet, walked slowly out with the lantern in his hand, and stared down for a long time. A great and mastering rage was gathering in his breast, but words offered no outlet to it until Bill said with heavy seriousness, "I told Doc he hadn't ought to sell, but he notioned your price was close to being a fair one."

Then Finis swore. He swore in a low-pitched monotony of sound, from which he emerged only once to demand from George the return of the dollar bill he had given him to celebrate the deal.

But George also was on the point of going mad. He stood in a corner with a dungfork, saying, "That doctor twerp got enough out of me already. He won't get nothing more."

"Cripus," said Finis suddenly. "He weren't only a boy by his looks."

"I thought you'd understand," Bill chuckled.

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"Bill," said Finis, "don't say nothing about this."

Bill laughed unpleasantly.

"Five dollars," said Finis.

"A dollar a day," said Bill.

Finis sat down, and suddenly he was a man again. He was thinking.

"In all my life," he said sombrely, "I wasn't never done on a deal. And I'll be danged if I'll let this boy-doctor do me. I wouldn't have, only I was too honest to suspicion him, Bill. I was honest, and here's what come of it."

The lantern at his feet showed water dimming his sharp blue eyes.

"It's tough," Bill said.

"I've got to make a profit on this mare," said Finis in a low voice. "If I don't I'll have to go to New York, where folks is softer. But I've got to make an honest profit. You see that, boys. If I don't, that pink young hellion is going to have the snort on me."

"Well," said Bill, "I'll leave you think it out yourself."

He went away. For half an hour Finis clasped his head in thought.

Then he said, as if feeling his way toward something, "Westernville."

In the darkness of the barn George felt his jaw come open.

"Westernville," said Finis. "Westernville. . . . They're a great bunch to play cards. . . . They've got sporting notions. . . . Quite a lot of boaters over there. They always take a chance, the big bezabors. . . . Westernville."

He looked over his shoulder. There was sweat on his cheeks, and George saw that the ends of his mustache were knotted squarely.

"I'll do an honest deal," said Finis loudly, "and make an honest profit, by jeepers cripus! George, you come from Westernville. Don't they play cards in the store real late on Sunday nights?"

"I guess that's right," said George.

"Hitch up that white trotter to the buggy. I bought him for a stepper. By gander, I'll get a chance to feel out his pulse now."

It took them a moment to get the snorting beast into the shafts. Finis climbed up with his whip while George held the horse's head.

Before George could get off the ground, the hind wheels had skidded into the main street.

It was the bride who finally, after three weeks' honeymoon, suggested that they return to Ava.

"You can't afford to lose your practice, Jonathan N.," she said.

With obvious reluctance the doctor agreed. Perhaps he had a New England conscience, and, now that the deal was over, perhaps it troubled him.

"We'll get in by the evening train," he said, "so our neighbors won't know we're back till the next morning. We'll fool them that way."

She looked at him adoringly.

"I think that's nice," she said.

So they packed up that night, after they had spent an evening together by the great cataract — an ideal spot for lovers, precluding speech. And they got on the train next morning

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on the long trip home. All day it seemed to Ermintrude that her husband was unduly absorbed in his own thoughts, but she supposed that he must be regulating them for a return to an arduous life, and she tried to be helpful by assuming a cheerful silence.

So they came back, and the doctor suggested that they get off on the wrong side of the train. She was the first to get down, and it did her good to see that they had been watching for her husband, for there was a man waiting there. He clapped her husband on the shoulder.

"Hello, Doc," he said.

She saw that he was a lean man with a long yellow mustache, and that her husband was embarrassed. She wondered if it was because the lean man smelled so uncommonly of horses. But then she heard the doctor say, "Finis, I've been thinking over that deal we made, and I've been thinking maybe I took too much. Suppose I give you back a hundred."

She was worried and puzzled by her husband's troubled voice, and she turned appealing eyes on the thin man. He was grinning in a very friendly way at her and twisting together the ends on his pale mustache over his chin.

"Don't you bother, Doc," he replied in his mild voice. "I made a profit of a hundred dollars on that mare."

The bride heard her husband draw a long breath.

"Yeanh," said the horsy man, "I made a profit of a hundred dollars on that mare; and I done it honest, too. *I* never cheated a man in a deal."

The doctor seemed to wince — then he stuttered a question inaudible to his wife, and the horsy man laughed as if to himself.

"When that mare was delivered," he said, "I was surprised. But I said to myself, 'Of course the doc don't know about it — it's that bezabor Bill. It would be hard,' I said, 'if the doc was a loser just on account of accident. But,' I says, 'if I can make an honest profit and deal, I won't say nothing.' So I recollected that there was always late Sunday night card games over to Westernville, and that they was a sporting proposition over there. And I knowed for a fact that some of them would want that mare; so I hitched up my white trotter and went scooting over. It was muddy roads, but we got there inside of an hour and a half — which is some night driving, Doc; that horse is sure a dinger for night driving, Doc, and I could let him go cheap for a cash turnover."

The horsy man cocked his head, but as the doctor said nothing he went on. And as he went on his voice gained a little in excitement, and it seemed to the doctor's bride that she could see him all muddy bursting through the door and stopping the pinochle games, his blue eyes shining.

"I went into the store," said Finis, "and I says, 'Boys, drinks.' And there wasn't one of them bezabors didn't step up. 'Boys,' says I, 'I'm an honest man, and I've come over to make an

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honest proposition to you. I've gone and bought the doctor's mare,' I says, 'and I've paid out five hundred dollars for her. That's a big price to get a profit on, and I wouldn't ask one of you to give it to me. But I says to myself, "Them Westernville boys is sporting," and I figgered this way. I'll sell seven hundred-dollar tickets; we'll put 'em in a hat when the cash has been delivered, and let anyone you say drawr.' Believe me or not, them 'bezabors made up that seven hundred dollars in about seven minutes. The keep drawred, and Jerry Bumstead was the lucky man. Them Irish canawlers is all lucky as the devil. He wanted to come back with me to collect the mare, so I took him. But when he seen the mare lying belly-up in the yard he certainly did cuss. I says, 'Jerry, I'm an honest man. I've never been cheated and I won't cheat you. This is an honest deal, so here's *your* hundred dollars back.'"

Finis was still grinning. All at once the doctor grinned back.

"Finis," he said, "I want you to meet Mrs. Nickerson."

Finis made a bow.

"Mam," he said, stowing his cud of tobacco well back and holding her hand in both of his, "you've married the smartest man in seven counties, barring only I. Finis Wilson. Can I carry your bag?"

"Q"

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Yet we should caution you that "Lacrimae Rerum" does ask for careful reading and reasonable concentration: give these to the story and you will be rewarded by an unusual, and in some respects brilliant, adventure in detection . . .

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LACRIMAE RERUM

by EDMUND CRISPIN

"You chatter about 'the perfect crime'," said Wakefield irritably, "but you seem incapable of realizing that it isn't a topic one can *argue* about at all. One can only pontificate, which is irrational and useless."

"Have some more port," said Haldane.

"Well, yes, I will . . . The perfect murder, for instance, isn't known to be a murder at all; it looks like natural death, and no suggestion of foul play ever enters anyone's mind. Only the *imperfect* murders are *known* to be murders. And consequently, to argue about 'the perfect murder' is to argue about something which you cannot, by definition, prove to exist."

"Your logic," said Gervase Fen, "isn't exactly impeccable."

Wakefield gazed at him stonily. "What's wrong with my logic?" he demanded.

"Its major premise is wrong. You've gone astray in defining the perfect murder."

"I have n— How have I gone astray?"

"The sort of thing you suggest — the apparently natural death — has one serious disadvantage from the murderer's point of view."

"And that is?" Wakefield leaned forward across the table. "That is?"

"At the risk of boring you all, I could illustrate it." Gervase Fen glanced at his host and his fellow-guests, who nodded a vinously emphatic approval; only Wakefield, who hated losing the conversational initiative, showed any sign of restiveness. "What I have in mind is a murder which was committed several years before the war — the first criminal case, as it happens, with which I ever had anything to do."

"Quite a distinction for it," Wakefield muttered uncivilly into his wine glass.

"No doubt. And it was certainly the most daring and ingenious crime I've ever encountered."

"They all are," said Wakefield.

"It succeeded, did it?" Haldane interposed rather hurriedly. "That is to say, the criminal wasn't discovered or punished?"

"Discovered," said Fen, "but not punished."

"You mean there was no case against him?"

"There was a cast-iron case; conclusive proof, followed by a circumstantial confession. But the police couldn't act on it."

"Oh, well," said Wakefield disgustedly, "if all you mean is that he escaped to some country he couldn't be extradited from —"

Gervase Fen shook his head. "That isn't at all what I mean. The murderer is at the present moment living quite

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openly almost next door to New Scotland Yard."

There was a general stir of interest.

"I don't see how that's possible," Wakefield said sourly.

"And you never will," Haldane told him, "if you don't stop talking and give us a chance to hear about it . . . Go on, Gervase."

"The murder I mean," said Fen, "is the murder of Alan Pasmore, in 1935."

"Pasmore the composer?" Wakefield asked.

"Yes."

"I remember it caused quite a commotion at the time," said Haldane thoughtfully. "And then it all seemed suddenly to fade out, and one heard no more about it."

Fen chuckled. "The authorities were over-precipitate," he explained, "and naturally they were anxious that their shortcomings shouldn't be advertised. Hence the conspiracy of silence . . .

"Pasmore and his wife were living at Amersham, in Bucks. He was forty-seven at the time of his death, and at the height of his reputation; though since then he's sunk almost completely into oblivion, and nowadays his stuff's hardly ever performed.

"His wife, Angela, was a good deal younger — twenty-six, to be exact. Attractive, intelligent, competent. As well as seeing to it that his house was kept like a new pin, she acted as his secretary. There was plenty of money — his, not hers. No children. Three servants. Superficially, it seemed quite a successful marriage, as marriages go.

"On the afternoon of October 2nd, 1935, two visitors came to tea.

"One was Sir Charles Frazer, the conductor, who lived only a few miles away. The other was a wholly unimportant young man called Beasley, who worked at an insurance office in the City. Both of them, it appears, were to some extent infatuated with Angela Pasmore. Sir Charles was there by invitation; Beasley just 'dropped in.' And neither of them was pleased to find the other there, since at tea-time, if she were at home at all, you could be sure of having Angela to yourself. Her husband always worked from two to six in the afternoon, and had his tea alone in the study upstairs.

"At four o'clock, then, tea was served in the downstairs drawing-room to Angela, to Sir Charles, and to Beasley. Five minutes later the afternoon mail arrived. It was taken from the postman at the front door by Soames, the manservant, who carried it straight to the drawing-room and gave it to Angela. It consisted of a card for Soames, several letters and cards for Angela, and a single typewritten envelope for Pasmore. This last Angela immediately opened. She glanced through the letter inside and then handed it, with a slight grimace, to Sir Charles."

"And why," Wakefield inquired, "did she do that?"

"The letter," Fen continued unperturbed, "was from another conductor — Paul Brice, to be specific.

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He was in Edinburgh (where, as it was afterwards proved, this letter had been posted on the previous afternoon), and there, at the Usher Hall in two days' time, he was scheduled to conduct the Hallé Orchestra in a concert whose program included Pasmore's symphonic poem *Merlin*. *Merlin* was at this date quite a new work. It had had only one performance so far, under Sir Charles Frazer at the Queen's Hall. And since the score was tolerably complicated, Brice wanted advice from the composer on a good many points of interpretation.

"That was what his letter was about. I've seen it, and it consisted of a long list of things like: '*At 3 after C, can I relax tempo in the bar and a half before the Bb entry?*' and: '*At 5 before Q, string accompaniment and clarinet solo are both marked p, but clarinet doesn't come through; pp accompaniment would blur harmonic texture; can clarinet play mf?*' and: '*At 7 after Y, do you want the più mosso as in the exposition?*' There were, I think, at least two dozen such queries. Conductors aren't normally so conscientious, but Brice and Pasmore were lifelong friends, and Brice took Pasmore's music rather more seriously than its actual merits warranted.

"You will understand now"—and Fen eyed Wakefield with a certain severity — "why Angela should show this letter to Sir Charles. Having conducted the first and only performance of the work in question, he might be expected to be interested. He read the letter attentively, commenting, uncharitably one gathers, on Brice's artistic perceptivity. Then he gave it back to Angela.

"She in turn handed it to Soames, who was still hovering in the background, and told him to take it up to her husband with his tea, which by immutable custom was served to him at four fifteen. This he did, testifying subsequently that at four fifteen Pasmore was alive, uninjured, and in every way normal.

"At four twenty Angela excused herself to her two visitors and left the drawing-room — in order, as she asserted later, to 'powder her nose.' Beasley and Sir Charles remained together, making mistrustful small-talk, until at half-past four she returned. She then stayed with them up to a quarter to five, when — as she'd previously warned them — she was engaged to drive her cook, Mrs. May, to the Chesham Cottage Hospital to visit her son, who had recently smashed himself to bits in a motorcycle accident. Beasley and Sir Charles weren't much pleased at being superseded by this work of mercy, but there was nothing they could do about it; so, with Angela, they left the drawing-room and went out into the hall. Here she asked them to wait while she went up to her bedroom, whose door was clearly visible at the head of the stairs. And I'd better emphasize at this point, to save futile racking of your brains, that both men saw her go straight into this room, and that both were prepared to swear she couldn't have entered any other room

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upstairs, let alone the study, without their knowing."

"There being, of course" — Haldane picked up his glass and stared pensively at it before drinking — "no means of communication between the bedroom and the study."

"None whatever; care was taken to establish that. Moreover, Angela wasn't, according to Sir Charles and Beasley, in the bedroom for more than a minute at most. Emerging from it, she ran straight downstairs, went to the clothes closet in the hall, disappeared into it for a few seconds, departed to the kitchen to fetch Mrs. May, returned with her immediately, took a coat from the clothes closet and put it on, and finally shepherded Mrs. May and Sir Charles and Beasley to the front door. Outside, she said goodbye to the two men and got into the car with Mrs. May. And from then on she was with Mrs. May continually, in the car or at the hospital, until at least twenty minutes after her husband's body was found.

"All of which boils down to this: that if Pasmore was killed by his wife, she could only have done it between four twenty and four thirty, when she was away from the drawing-room.

"It was Soames who found the body, when at six o'clock — again in accordance with immutable custom — he took whisky and water up to the study for Pasmore's preprandial drink. There proved, on investigation, to be nothing in the immediate circumstances of the crime that could help the police. Pasmore had been stabbed in the back while sitting at his desk, and had died instantaneously. The weapon was an eighteenth-century Venetian stiletto which hung normally over the study mantelpiece. There had been very little bleeding. The room had not been disturbed, and nothing, so far as could be discovered, was missing. There were no fingerprints on the weapon, and none in the room except such as were to be expected: the servants', Angela's, the dead man's. The police doctor arrived on the scene too late to be able to state the time of death with any certainty; 'probably between four and five' was the most he could say. A cookie had been eaten and a cup of tea drunk, Pasmore's prints being on the cup; and he had been killed, according to the *post-mortem* findings, between five and fifteen minutes after consuming these things. But since there was no evidence as to *when* he had consumed them — whether immediately after being brought the tea-tray, or later — that didn't help, either.

"In short, the police had uncommonly little to work on; all the same, within three days Angela was under arrest.

"Only a very brief investigation had been needed to reveal the fact that the marriage was not as successful as on the surface it appeared; that, not to be longwinded about it, Pasmore's *ménage* was on the rocks. Angela had committed adultery with some worthless poltroon whose name I can't now remember, Pasmore had

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found out, and Pasmore was determined on divorcing her — had, indeed, actually taken the preliminary steps towards doing so. His fortune was considerable; divorce would have put it permanently beyond Angela's reach; and so it was clear that she had motive enough for killing him. There was opportunity, too — those ten minutes during which she had been absent from the drawing-room. Questioned about whether she'd entered her husband's study during that time, she denied doing so. And that was fatal, since it happened that both Soames and a maidservant had seen her do so . . . Mind you, all the evidence against her was circumstantial; there wasn't, nor apparently could there be, any conclusive *proof* of guilt. But circumstantial evidence is quite commonly hanging evidence, and the police were perfectly justified in making the arrest. In due course the indictment was sanctioned by the Department of Public Prosecutions, and Angela, reserving her defense, was committed for trial at the Assizes.

"She pleaded Not Guilty, admitting, in the witness-box, that she *had* entered Pasmore's study, but stating that she left him alive and well — 'writing a letter; I don't think he'd started his tea' — after a couple of minutes' casual conversation about household matters. The Prosecution's case being on the thin side, the Defense had reasonable hopes of an acquittal; and but for Angela's own behavior in the witness-box, they would have been fairly confident of it. Unfortunately, however, she blustered and contradicted herself and told transparent lies and in general made a very poor impression. What would have happened if the trial had run normally to its end, one doesn't know. And the question is academic, since it didn't run normally to its end. At almost the last possible moment, when the judge was on the point of starting his summing-up, the Prosecution quite unexpectedly entered a plea of *nolle prosequi;* new evidence had emerged, it was stated, which conclusively established the prisoner's innocence. The judge had no alternative but to direct the jury to bring in a verdict of Not Guilty; the jury obeyed; and Angela Pasmore was acquitted of her husband's murder.

"You'll have guessed that the 'new evidence' had to do with Brice's letter. What actually happened, during the final day of the trial, was this:

"Angela remembered something which, she said, had been completely driven out of her mind by her husband's death, by the investigation, and by her own arrest — namely, the existence of a reply by Pasmore to that letter from Brice which had arrived by the afternoon post. It was Pasmore's habit to put letters which he wanted mailed on the dressing-table in her bedroom (the servants, by the way, corroborated this). And on going up to her bedroom, just prior to leaving the house with Mrs. May, she had found this reply there, had put it in an envelope and addressed it, and had taken it downstairs in her

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pocket, transferring it at once to the pocket of her outdoor coat, which was hanging in the clothes closet in the hall. Thereafter (I continue to quote her own account of the matter), she not only forgot to post it — as one does occasionally forget to post letters — but also forgot, in the eventual confusion and distress, that the thing had ever existed. And presumably it was still in the pocket of her coat.

"All of this Angela communicated to her Counsel. And he, naturally, wasn't slow to see the importance of it. *If* Brice's letter had not reached Pasmore till four fifteen, as it probably hadn't; *if* he had written a reply to it; *if* that reply had taken him more than fifteen minutes to write, as it probably had — then Angela could not have murdered him, since the only opportunity *she* had had was between four twenty and four thirty.

"Someone was sent off post-haste to Amersham. The letter was found. Handwriting experts were unanimous in agreeing that Pasmore had written it — that no part of it was forged. Tests established the fact that the absolute minimum time required to write it must have been twenty minutes. As to its content, that was a *seriatim* answer to Brice's queries, such as Pasmore could only have produced with the details of those queries in front of him. The arrival of Brice's letter by the afternoon mail was sworn to beyond the possibility of contradiction by the postman, by Soames, by Beasley, and by Sir Charles. And Brice was emphatic that by no conceivable means could Pasmore have become acquainted with the questions about Merlin *prior* to the arrival of the letter.

"You see what all this evidence added up to: Pasmore couldn't have been killed before twenty-five to five at the earliest; and therefore it was not Angela who killed him."

Finishing his port, Fen lit a cigarette.

"As for myself," he went on after a moment's consideration, "I had no personal contact with the affair until after the trial was over. I read about it more or less attentively in the papers, and that was all. But about a week after Angela's acquittal I was dining with the Chief Constable of Buckinghamshire, and he, knowing I had a lay interest in criminology, showed me the dossier of the case. Most of it was just repetition and expansion of what I already knew. There was also, however, a complete typewritten copy of Pasmore's letter to Brice. And something in the last paragraph of that letter struck me as being ever so slightly odd. . .

"The bulk of the thing, as I've told you, was simply a point-by-point reply, impersonal and business-like in tone, to Brice's queries. The final paragraph, though, ran like this:

"*Forgive me if I don't write more. I'm in the middle of scoring* Ariadne *(with a concert on my next-door neighbor's wireless — lacrimae rerum! — to help me along) and am anxious, as you know, to get it done as quickly as possible. Good luck to the performance —*

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I'm sorry I can't be there. Yours — and so forth.

"Well, the police had, of course, checked this business of the concert; and Pasmore's neighbor's radio had, in fact, been on between three thirty and four forty-five. So far, so good. But '*lacrimae rerum*' — somehow that particular tag was wrong in that particular context. One's neighbor's radio is often tiresome, no doubt. But one doesn't use, as a comment on it, a phrase intended to express the profound, essential melancholy of all human activities — and more, of existence itself; the nuisance is too trivial and localized. And it occurred to me, as a consequence of this disparity, that '*lacrimae rerum*' might carry some specialized meaning for Brice and Pasmore — might in effect be a sort of private joke. Luckily, Brice was conducting at Oxford three or four days later, and I was able to make contact with him and to ask him about it. And my notion turned out to be right. Brice and Pasmore had been at school together, had been close friends there, united in a passionately earnest devotion to music — a devotion whose naïveté occasionally bordered on the ludicrous. And on one occasion, when they had been listening together to Tchaikowsky's Sixth Symphony, Pasmore had remarked, in solemn, awe-struck tones: "*Lacrimae rerum*, Paul; it sums up the whole tragedy of humankind." Brice had been much amused by this pretentious gloss on the music, and thereafter '*lacrimae rerum*' had been often used between them as a means of referring to that particular work.

"So naturally I went away and hunted through back numbers of *The Radio Times* until I found the program of the concert which had been broadcast on the afternoon of Pasmore's murder. It consisted of two works, the Walton Symphony followed by the Tchaikowsky Sixth; and there was no difficulty in calculating that the Tchaikowsky must have begun at about a quarter past four and gone on until the end of the concert at a quarter to five. All quite straightforward, you see: no discrepancy with the suggestion that Pasmore's reply to Brice had been written more or less immediately after receiving Brice's letter at four fifteen.

"There I might have left it, but for the chance that I was lecturing in Amersham a week or so later, and, having an hour or so to spare, decided to go and interview Pasmore's neighbor — he of the radio. He turned out to be a pleasant little man — something to do with the Home Office, I fancy — and naturally enough he still remembered the events of the crucial afternoon quite clearly. He'd had that concert on all right, from beginning to end, but beyond that there didn't seem to be anything of value he could tell me. And I was on the point of leaving, in a welter of civilities, before he quite unexpectedly let the cat out of the bag.

" 'Of course, the police questioned me about it,' he said, 'and even though that wasn't till several weeks after-

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wards, I had no difficulty in recalling the concert — partly, no doubt, because of the change in the program.'

"I must have looked as though I'd seen a ghost. 'Change?' I echoed.

" 'Why, yes. For some mysterious reason of their own they played the Tchaikowsky first and the Walton second.'

"And they had. I checked with the BBC, and it was true. Owing to some kind of mismanagement, the orchestral parts of the Walton hadn't been in the studio at the start of the concert, and the Tchaikowsky had had to be played while the Walton parts were searched for. Therefore, the Tchaikowsky — '*lacrimae rerum*' — had *finished* at four o'clock; and therefore, if the reference in the final paragraph meant anything at all, Pasmore's letter to Brice had been completed by four o'clock."

Fen chuckled suddenly. "And given that, it didn't really require much thinking to deduce how Angela's alibi had been contrived. The police, as I discovered, had worked it all out for themselves — but not, unfortunately, until after the acquittal."

Fen paused, and Haldane shook his head. "I'm afraid that for my own part —"

"Oh, come . . . Brice's letter had been posted in Edinburgh on the previous afternoon. It arrived at Amersham, of course, by the *morning* post on the day of the murder. Angela opened it — I've mentioned that she acted as Pasmore's secretary — and saw in it her opportunity. She destroyed the envelope in which it arrived, made a note of Brice's queries, typed a fresh envelope, inserted the letter, stamped, and *posted it again*. She could thus be fairly sure of its arriving a second time, in the presence of the invited and infatuated Sir Charles, by the afternoon post. And in the meantime she went to her husband and said something like this:

" 'Brice rang up from Edinburgh while you were out. He's written you a letter about *Merlin*, but it struck him that it might possibly not arrive soon enough for your reply to reach him in time for the final rehearsal. I've made a note of his queries, and if you write off to him some time this afternoon, that should be all right.'

"Pasmore would believe this — why shouldn't he? — and the reply to Brice would be written. And all that Angela had to do after that was to destroy the notes she'd made of Brice's queries and the envelope, typed by herself and with a local postmark on it, in which Brice's letter arrived at the house for the second time. Between four twenty and four thirty, of course, she entered Pasmore's study and killed him."

There was a brief, astonished silence; then: "Brilliant!" Haldane exclaimed. "Really brilliant . . . only" — his enthusiasm waned slightly — "there are a lot of things which *could* have gone wrong. Pasmore might just have omitted to write the reply; or it might not have been long enough — though I suppose that in view of the

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number of queries it was bound to be fairly long; or it might have contained some very definite reference to the hour of day at which it was being written."

"Yes, yes, I know all that," said Fen. "But you must realize that all these possible accidents and possible flaws in the scheme have one thing in common: if they were going to happen at all, they would happen *before the murder*. So if anything had gone wrong, Pasmore would quite simply not have been killed — not on that day, and in that particular way."

Again there was silence.

"I suppose she missed the point of '*lacrimae rerum*'," said Haldane at last. "Interpreted it as just a general comment on neighbors' radios . . . She'd read the letter, of course, before killing Pasmore."

Fen nodded. "Certainly she would. It's to be presumed that Pasmore put it in her bedroom about four o'clock, and that she read it there, at twenty past four, before going to the study and killing him . . . I don't know why I say 'presumed.' By Angela's own admission that's what in fact happened. I wrote to her, you see — at considerable risk of a libel action — and by return post she sent me congratulations on my perspicuity and a circumstantial account of the crime."

"But look here," said Wakefield with sudden energy, "you can't possibly maintain that she arranged for Pasmore's letter to be her alibi and then *forgot* about it."

"Of course she didn't forget. She only pretended to — that was the whole point of her scheme. We're back where we started, you see; this is where the business of 'the perfect crime' comes in. Your murder which looks like natural death — well, it's satisfactory up to a point; but the murderer can never be *quite* sure that one day, perhaps years after, some accident may not reveal the truth and send him to the gallows. His only road to absolute immunity from punishment is to be tried and acquitted, for it's a basic principle of English Common Law that *nemo debet bis vexari* — that no one may be tried a second time for the same offense. Angela *wanted* to be tried, in order that she might be acquitted and live afterwards in perpetual immunity. Hence, Pasmore's letter was 'forgotten' until the right moment for its use arrived. Angela took a great deal of risk, of course. But it worked out very nicely for her in the end."

"Well, I consider it's abominable," said Haldane with disgust.

"There are those" — Gervase Fen spoke very mildly — "who would maintain that such injustices are invariably rectified at a higher court."

"Ah." Wakefield sat up abruptly. "And why do they maintain that? They maintain it because they believe the Universe to be subject to Laws, and they believe that because the phenomenal flux, without the concept of Order, is psychologically intolerable. Aldous Huxley —"

"Have some more port," said Haldane.

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BLUE GLASS

by RAOUL WHITFIELD

WHEN the cabin phone made a buzzing sound, Jo Gar was dozing. A soft, warm breeze blew in through the port; the *Cheyo Maru* was some seven hours away from the Hawaiian Islands — and Honolulu. The diminutive detective sat up wearily and turned his bruised face towards the French phone.

"Yes — this is Señor Gar."

The voice at the other end of the wire was flat, almost expressionless.

"You would give much, Señor — to recover the other nine Von Loffler diamonds — the famous Rainbow diamonds?"

The questioning note was very faint, but the words had an immediate effect on Jo Gar.

"Yes — much."

There was another silence. Then the voice sounded again.

"How much, Señor Gar?"

The Philippine Island detective narrowed his gray-blue, slightly almond shaped eyes.

"I do not appreciate jokes. Many aboard this boat are naturally aware of my identity. Quite a few men have died because of the Von Loffler stones. If you are —"

"I am not joking." For the first time there was some tone in the other's voice. "I have information that will be of value to you."

Jo Gar said steadily: "Then pardon me. If you will allow me to talk with you in your cabin —"

For the second time there was an interruption.

"I have asked you a question, Señor Gar. I am aware of many things concerning the Von Loffler stones. Ten were stolen from the jewelry shop in Manila. You have recovered one. Your friend Juan Arragon has been murdered. You have killed — and others have killed. You believe that the nine missing stones are aboard this vessel, and that a woman has them in her possession. Is it not so?"

The Island detective closed his eyes. "It is as you say," he said simply.

The voice continued: "You very narrowly escaped death more than once — in Honolulu, Señor Gar. The missing stones are worth almost two hundred thousand dollars. I can tell you that the one who carried out the orders of Benfeld, and who was responsible for murders that included your friend Arragon — that person is aboard the *Cheyo Maru*."

There was a pause. The voice said: "Speak, please, Señor Gar."

Jo Gar smiled with a touch of grimness. "I am still in my cabin, Señor," he replied.

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There was a short silence. Then the other said in the same, flat voice:

"You would be well rewarded if you were to return to Manila with the missing stones, and the murderer, Señor Gar. There would be rest for you. That is why I ask the amount you would be willing to pay."

Jo Gar said slowly: "I am a poor man."

The other's voice became sharp again. "You have been fortunate, Señor Gar. In the States it will be different. And the diamonds will not be difficult to sell."

The Island detective's voice held a grim note. "They are very fine stones, and perfectly matched. By this time they are very well known. Perhaps they would be extremely difficult to sell."

Impatience was evident in the voice that came from the other end of the wire.

"You are not a fool — you know the stones will not be difficult to dispose of, Señor Gar. You know they will be smuggled through the customs officers. And in San Francisco you will lose the trail you were lucky enough to pick up. Even if you should blunder on —"

The voice died. Jo Gar said grimly: "All this being so, why do you call me?"

The voice said: "I do not care what becomes of the nine diamonds, or of a certain murderer. I need money. I call you to give you the chance, the big chance. You have traveled many miles, Señor Gar."

The Island detective spoke in a low voice. "How do I know that you will direct me to the right person?"

The voice held a hard note. "I do not expect you to trust me, Señor. You may pay after you are convinced."

The Island detective was silent. The other said:

"The question is — how *much* will you pay?"

Jo Gar replied steadily: "There is a reward of ten thousand dollars offered by the owner of the Manila jewelry shop, whose son was killed. I imagine the insurance company would pay twenty thousand dollars for the return of the stones."

"No — that will not do." The other's voice was steady. "That is all in the future. I must have payment now."

Jo Gar spoke gently into the French phone mouthpiece.

"I do not carry thousands of dollars about with me. I am a poor man."

The voice said calmly: "You are known to the captain of the boat. I am not asking much. Five thousand dollars, and one half of your reward, when you receive it, Señor Gar. And I am not to be betrayed."

Jo Gar widened his eyes and smiled. "You are only to betray," he said grimly.

The other's voice was very low and hard. "That is — quite so," he said. "You agree?"

The Island detective stopped smiling. "I agree," he said simply. "I

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will pay five thousand dollars to you, in the manner you direct, after the stones are recovered and the murderer is under arrest. I will give you half of my reward when it is paid. I am very tired. Your identity will not be known, only to me."

"No," the other said. "It will not be known to you. I will trust you. If you do not pay, I will kill you. That will be very simple, since you will not know against whom to guard."

Jo Gar said tonelessly: "Yes — very simple."

"In Cabin C. 15 there is a woman named Jetmars. She has with her a little girl of about eight. She got aboard at Manila, and dresses in black most of the time. Possibly you have seen her."

The Island detective said steadily: "Yes — I have noticed her, and the little girl."

The voice said: "In her cabin or on her person, or on the person of the little girl — are the diamonds. When you have obtained them I will communicate again with you."

Jo Gar said. "And she is also a murderess?"

The voice replied flatly: "Yes."

There was a clicking sound, and when Jo spoke again there was no answer. He hung up the receiver, threw a light robe about him and hurried from the cabin. When he reached the small cabin that held the *Cheyo Maru* switchboard, he was breathing swiftly. A Chinese boy stared at him with dark, long eyes.

"I am Señor Gar," Jo said softly. "An important call just reached me in Cabin B. 10. I would like very much to know where it came from."

The Chinese boy said easily: "I remember making the connection. It came from one of the three phones in the men's smoking room."

The Island detective smiled a little wearily.

"Thank you," he said, and moved back towards his cabin. Inside, he removed his robe, lighted a brown paper cigarette and lay on his back.

"Curious," Jo murmured. "A woman who dresses in black. A little girl."

The Island detective sat up slowly as the phone made a buzzing sound again. "Señor Gar," he said.

The flat voice come clearly. "I told you it would be useless to attempt tracing the call, Señor. You have made a bargain. If you do not stick to it —"

Jo Gar said grimly: "You will kill me?"

The other replied: "Yes."

The Island detective was silent for a few seconds. Then he said:

"In that case you will be able to collect the diamonds and the reward. You will not have to share anything."

There was a tight lipped smile on his face as he spoke. But the one at the other end of the wire said sharply:

"It is simpler for you to do — than for me. That is why I made an offer."

Jo Gar inhaled smoke from his cigarette. "Look about the smoking room," he suggested. "Is there a

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short man present — rather heavy? Smoking a cigar — very black?"

The man at the other end of the phone chuckled.

"Thinking that such a person might be present, I am not making *this* call from the smoking room," he said almost pleasantly. "The switchboard boy will tell you I am calling from the sun deck, port side."

Jo Gar said: "Pardon — I shall make no further effort to learn your identity."

The other chuckled again. "Thank you, Señor," he mocked. "But even should you change your mind — it will be of no use. A pleasant trip — and good fortune."

On the third day out the *Cheyo Maru* was rolling a bit; spray was breaking over the prow and there were not too many passengers on the decks. Jo Gar stood near the starboard rail, well aft, and watched the woman in black and the little girl who accompanied her. The woman was middle aged, had a rather sharp, sunburned face. The child was not very pretty. She was stringing beads. The woman paid little attention to her, and none to the other passengers. Jo had been watching her closely for two days, and yet he had not appeared to be watching. And he had listened to many voices of men, hearing none like the one that had come over the phone. He had not expected that.

He was working under a handicap; he felt that he was being watched and he did not know the person who watched him. He had learned that the woman who wore black much of the time was named Rosa Jetmars, that she had come aboard at Manila and that the child was her daughter. The purser volunteered the information that he understood Mrs. Jetmars was Spanish, had married an American in the Islands. Her husband had died very recently. His body was not aboard the vessel, but it was thought that his widow was going to the States and his family. That was all the Island detective had learned. It had little to do with the nine missing diamonds.

Someone near the rail called attention to a school of flying fish. It was a large one; the little girl jumped from her deck chair, started towards the rail. She tripped, fell awkwardly, crying out. Beads scattered and rolled across the deck. Jo Gar started forward, but an elderly man had already lifted the girl. Something blue rolled and struck against Jo's right shoe. The woman in black was bending over the girl. She seemed angry. She spoke in Spanish and very rapidly. Her back was turned to Jo.

He leaned down and picked up the bead. It was peculiarly cut, for a bead — touch told him that instantly. He glanced at it, his eyes narrowing. Several men were picking up other beads from the deck surface — much fuss was being made over the child. The woman in black had taken her back to her chair, was talking rapidly to her. Jo Gar slipped the bead in his pocket and stared at the sea.

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When he glanced towards the woman in black again she was still talking to the child. Men were putting beads in the girl's lap. There was laughter now, and the woman in black did not seem so angry. After a few minutes Jo Gar went below, locked his cabin door and got the one Von Loffler diamond from its tiny pocket in the cork of one of his medicine bottles.

He compared it with the bead, which was blue. His lips parted and he said very softly:

"The cutting is — exactly the same!"

An hour later, in the captain's cabin, he had the diamond expert who had helped him earlier in the trip examine the bead. When the expert had finished his examination he said in a puzzled voice:

"It is exceptionally well cut — diamond cut. Nothing cheap about the cutting. A great deal of care has been taken — for a piece of blue glass."

Jo Gar said slowly: "There is no doubt but what it is glass?"

The expert smiled at him. "Not a bit — it is blue glass, cut as a fine diamond might be. A good sized diamond. Like, say, one of the Von Loffler stones you —"

Jo Gar's frown stopped him. The captain raised his head and stared at Jo. But the Island detective simply reached for the bead, slipped it into a pocket of his light suiting.

The captain of the Japanese liner said in his stiff English:

"It is very curious, Señor Gar —"

The Island detective showed his white teeth in a lazy smile. He nodded his head very slowly.

"Very curious," he agreed cheerfully. "But many curious facts are not too important."

The captain said: "It will not be very long before we dock in San Francisco, Señor. It has been an exciting voyage for you, and not very successful. One diamond recovered — and nine still missing."

Jo Gar offered cigarettes, lighted one. The diamond expert spoke.

"But he has this bit of blue glass — it may be that it is important."

The Island detective smiled. "In what way?" he asked.

The two others looked at each other. The captain shrugged, smiled. The diamond expert muttered to himself. The captain said:

"Each of us has our profession — yours is a difficult one, Señor Gar."

The Island detective grinned. "Often I am given unexpected help," he said. "Perhaps it will be that way — before we land."

He went towards the door of the captain's cabin, still smiling. But when he had bowed to the two men and was outside, his smile faded. He went without too much haste to his cabin, and had been inside only a few minutes when the phone buzzed. The flat voice said:

"I have additional information for you, Señor. The diamonds are to be smuggled through the customs as the child's beads. Perhaps they will

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be dipped in ink, or painted blue."

Jo Gar said evenly: "Thank you. But the diamonds have no holes in them — how can they be strung?"

There was slight impatience in the other's tone.

"Perhaps there will be some beads cut somewhat like the diamonds, in a box the child has. Some will be strung, but others will not be strung. It is not likely the customs officers will examine each bead in the box."

Jo Gar was smiling grimly, but his voice was serious.

"That is so. It is a clever idea."

The other's voice said: "But do not work too fast, Señor. I do not think the child has the diamonds, at present."

The clicking sound followed. Jo hung up and looked out of the port, at the roughening water. He thought: Nor do *I* think the child has them at the present moment. The woman in black was not much concerned about the spilled beads, when the girl fell on the deck. If I were to get into the cabin occupied by the woman and child, find a box of beads — I would probably find no diamonds. And yet, if I wait until the customs inspection is made —

He turned away from the port, frowning. He breathed out softly:

"This one who calls — he knows so much. And yet he would share much with me. He would lose a great deal of money by doing that. The whole reward would be his if he did not —"

He broke off, and his gray-blue eyes got very small and long. After a short time he inspected his Colt automatic, slipped it into a pocket of his light coat, stuffing a handkerchief over it. When he arrived on deck he walked slowly towards the bow, conscious, as usual, of the curious glances the passengers directed towards him.

He circled the deck twice; the second time he noted that the woman in black and the child had vacated their chairs. A middle-aged man approached, walking unsteadily as the boat rolled. He looked at Jo, but there was no expression in his blue eyes. He had a flabby, pale skin and very thin lips. They were almost opposite each other when the boat rolled more sharply. The Island detective let his small body strike the left side of the thin-lipped one, knocking him off balance.

"Pardon," Jo said. "I'm very — sorry."

He stood close to the other man, watched anger show in the blue eyes. More than anger showed, he thought. It was as though the thin-lipped one hated him fiercely, and had hated him for more than seconds.

"It was very careless of me," Jo said.

The other man's lips parted. He started to speak, but did not. A faint smile showed in his eyes; slowly his face twisted with it. He jerked his head downward abruptly, in an awkward bow. He shrugged, moved away from the Island detective.

Jo Gar continued his walk around the deck. But he did not meet the

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thin-lipped one on the starboard side. He did not see him again in the next half hour, and when he did locate the man he was in the smoking room, seated at a small table and with his back turned to the entrance from the port side of the deck.

A steward strolled along and smiled amiably at Jo. He beckoned to him, handed him a dollar bill. He designated the chair occupied by the thin-lipped one.

"That gentleman I seem to know," he said. "I should like you to go to the far end of the smoking room, then turn and come back. You will be able to see him. I should like to know his name. You are the deck steward?"

The steward nodded. He went into the smoking room and Jo Gar went to the port rail. When the steward returned he was smiling cheerfully.

"I placed his chair for him," he said. "He is a Mr. Tracy. He came aboard at Honolulu."

Jo nodded. "Thank you," he said. "It is not the one with whom I am acquainted."

He did a few more turns on the deck, his face expressionless. Then he went below and talked to the purser. Mr. Eugene Tracy occupied Cabin C. 82. He had booked passage at the last moment and had been forced to take a cabin on the lower deck, though he had wanted better quarters.

Jo Gar went up above and saw that the thin-lipped one was still in the smoking room. He was reading a magazine, and was slumped low in a comfortable chair. The Island detective moved close to the chair, very quietly. No other person was near the two of them; Jo spoke sharply but low, his voice holding a faint questioning note.

"Mr. Tracy?"

His words were very clear, but the one in the chair did not move. Jo stepped directly in front of the chair and looked down at the magazine that hid the thin-lipped one's face.

"Mr. Tracy?" he said again.

The man in the chair lowered his magazine. He looked at the Island detective with his blue eyes wide and questioning. Jo stared at him stupidly, shook his head.

"I'm sorry — again," he stated. "It is another Mr. Tracy I'm looking for — and they pointed you out. Please pardon me."

The one in the chair smiled almost pleasantly. He nodded his head, raised his magazine. Jo said very quietly:

"Have you the time, by any chance?"

Anger edged into the eyes of the man in the chair. Then the forced smile showed again. He shook his head. Jo bowed and moved away. As he went towards his cabin there was a half smile on his browned face. He was thinking that the thin-lipped one was a very silent person.

After dinner Jo Gar watched the thin-lipped man take the same chair he had occupied hours before, in the smoking room. The Island detective

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went to his cabin and changed from his dinner clothes to a dark, light weight suiting. He wore a dark colored shirt and was knotting a black bow tie when there was a knock at the cabin door. At his call a tall, slender man entered, closing the door carefully behind him.

"The captain said you had something for me to do," he said cheerfully. "My name's Porter — I'm an American and traveling to Frisco from Honolulu through courtesy of the line. I do ship news for a San Diego paper, and this is sort of a vacation."

Jo Gar nodded. "It is very simple," he said. "In the smoking room at present there is a man named Tracy. I will go up with you and point him out. I would like you to stay as close to him as is possible, for the next few hours, and to remember what he does. That is all. I shall be glad to pay —"

Porter smiled, shaking his head. "Not necessary, Señor Gar," he interrupted. "I'm glad to help out. And I won't talk."

Jo Gar smiled back at the newspaper man. "You would be very foolish if you did," he said. "There wouldn't be anything to talk about."

They went on deck and after walking several times around it, Jo pointed out the thin-lipped man. There was a vacant chair near him; Porter said he would go in and use it. Jo nodded.

"Do not come to me and do not speak to me if we meet later. I will speak first to you."

The newspaper man went into the smoking room. Jo passed the woman in black and the child, on the way to his cabin. The boat was rolling quite a bit and the woman looked sick and tired.

When he reached the cabin his phone was making a buzzing sound. Jo Gar closed the door behind him, locked it. He lifted the instrument, said slowly:

"This is Señor Gar."

The voice was flat and low. It said: "Mrs. Jetmars is having the child attract attention to itself. She is letting passengers see that the child has an interest in beads."

Jo Gar said nothing.

"I point this out to you, because perhaps you do not believe she has the diamonds for which you are searching."

The Island detective said with his almond shaped eyes almost closed:

"Perhaps it would be wise for me to enter her cabin, with the ship's captain, while she is absent. A thorough search —"

"I do not think it would be wise," the voice cut in. "But that is up to you, of course."

There was the clicking sound. Jo hung up and went to the ship switchboard room again. When he had asked the question the operator smiled cheerfully.

"The call came from Cabin C. 80," he stated.

He had been looking at a small book as he was speaking. His voice died abruptly; he widened his dark eyes on Jo Gar's expressionless ones.

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"Cabin C. 80 is vacant," he said stiffly.

The Island detective nodded his head. "The doors of vacant cabins are not always locked, are they?"

The switchboard boy narrowed his eyes. "No, Señor Gar," he replied. "They are left half opened, for ventilation."

Jo Gar moved towards the main saloon, frowning. Too many persons aboard the boat knew too much about him; even the Chinese boy at the switchboard was now addressing him by his name. He murmured to himself:

"It becomes — always more difficult."

In the smoking room the thin-lipped one was seated in the chair he had occupied before, still reading his magazine. The newspaper man was sprawled in a chair that faced the port side entrance to the room. Jo Gar beckoned to him, watched him rise slowly, stroll towards the entrance. The Island detective walked slowly aft, and Porter followed in the same fashion. Behind a ventilator Jo halted and lighted a cigarette. Porter reached his side.

"Well?" The Island detective's voice was very low.

Peter grinned. "You didn't expect him to move around much in *that* length of time, did you?" he replied.

Jo said steadily: "He never left the chair?"

Porter grunted. "All he moved was his fingers," he replied.

Jo sighed heavily.

"You have been very kind — and I shall not need your help for the present, Señor Porter."

The newspaper man looked surprised. "He wasn't the right guy, maybe?"

"After I left you I went to my cabin. I received a phone call that I half expected. But I expected, also, that the gentleman you were watching would *make* the call."

Porter whistled softly. "He didn't."

Jo Gar nodded. Porter said slowly: "I'm sorry it didn't work out the other way — the way you expected, Senor Gar."

The Island detective smiled with his lips tight against the paper of the cigarette. He stood with his short legs spread, swaying with the roll of the ship. He had picked the thin-lipped passenger as the one who had called him, using the flat, peculiar tone. He had listened to most of the others talk.

The others he had heard before; it had been a long trip from Manila. And the thin-lipped one had failed to answer quickly, naturally, to the name of Tracy. He had not spoken to Jo — had not answered his question about the time. It was difficult to disguise a voice, and Jo felt that the thin-lipped one had not made the effort. Thus he had not spoken when addressed. And yet, there had been the phone call just received — and the thin-lipped one had not made it.

Jo frowned down at the cigarette glow. Then, suddenly, his small body

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straightened, he drew a deep breath. Porter was watching him closely.

"You got an idea — that time," he muttered.

The Island detective narrowed his eyes on Porter's.

"That is so, Señor Porter — but it is so difficult to tell whether it is a *good* idea."

The newspaper man said grimly: "If it isn't — you'll probably find out quick enough."

Jo Gar smiled narrowly. "That is the trouble," he said simply.

The door of Cabin C. 82 was tightly closed, locked. Jo Gar took from his pocket the small, adjustable key, worked with it swiftly and expertly. It was after nine o'clock, but the thin-lipped man was still seated in his chair in the smoking room. The cabin steward for this section of the *Cheyo Maru* was on the opposite side of the boat; Jo had come to Cabin C. 82 slowly and carefully.

When the lock made faint clicking sounds he returned the master key to his pocket, moved the knob and slowly opened the door. He stepped inside quickly, shut the door without sound but did not lock it from the inside. The cabin was small and held the odor of cigarettes. There was little baggage about, but what there was bore the initials E. T. Jo Gar smiled a little, went towards cool colored curtains that formed a protection for hung clothes. There was only a coat of gray material hanging behind the curtains.

"Señor Tracy is traveling very lightly," Jo observed in a half whisper to himself.

He got his small body back of the curtains, arranging them so that he had a slitted view of the room, where they met. For several minutes he remained motionless. Then he stepped from behind the curtains and started the search. He worked very slowly and thoroughly, placing each object that he touched in the same spot from which he had raised it. Twice there was sound in the corridor, but neither time did he lock the cabin door. Instead, he got his diminutive body behind the curtains that faced the door.

He finished his search in a little over ten minutes, straightened and sighed. The phone made buzzing sounds three times. Jo got his right hand fingers over the grip of his Colt, moved behind the curtains and was motionless. Several minutes passed, and then there were footfalls in the narrow corridor beyond the cabin. A key turned in the lock — there was muttering. The door opened with a small crashing sound, but the thin lipped one did not immediately enter. He stood in the doorway — his eyes going about the room. Through the very thin slit where the curtains met Jo Gar watched him.

His body relaxed suddenly; he entered the cabin, closed the door behind him, locked it. His eyes kept moving about. He lifted the smaller of the bags, opened it, looked inside.

"He's been in here," he said in a

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peculiar, flat voice. "A lot of good *that* did him!"

Jo Gar half closed his almond-shaped eyes. This *was* the one who had called him, he knew that now. He moved the muzzle of the Colt slightly, so that it was pointed towards the body of the thin-lipped one.

After he had drawn a small curtain across the port, the thin-lipped man placed a towel over the knob of the door, draping it so that it covered the keyhole. Then he seated himself at a small table beneath the center light, and faced the port. His left side was turned towards Jo. From a vest pocket he took a red colored, large sized fountain pen. His face was grim as he unscrewed an end of it. The table at which he sat had a green surface; the thin-lipped one spilled the diamonds across it very carefully.

Jo Gar straightened his cramped body a little. He drew the Colt from his pocket, extended it through the slit in the curtains. His eyes could count five diamonds.

"A hundred — thousand!" The thin-lipped one's voice was not so flat now. "And with Gar chasing the Jetmars woman —"

He chuckled again, huskily. Jo Gar said in a cold, hard voice:

"— you might easily have got the stones through the customs —"

The man at the table jerked his body straight. His right-hand palm flattened over the diamonds; his white face turned towards the curtains. Jo parted them with his left hand, stepped away from them.

"But you weren't so wise," Jo said calmly and softly. "You don't know how much I knew, how much I had been told. So you thought I might be watching you, rather than the woman in black. You didn't know that Mendez had told me a woman had the Von Loffler diamonds. You called me, after she had given you the diamonds, afraid of me. The two of you gave the child beads of blue glass, cut very much like the Von Loffler stones. You wanted me to *believe* what you had suggested — that the woman in black was smuggling the stones through the customs — so that *you* could get them through without trouble. But you played too strongly."

The thin-lipped man was staring at him, breathing slowly and heavily. His right palm was still flat over the diamonds; his left arm rested on the table. The ship rolled and his body swayed with it. Jo Gar said:

"You didn't disguise your voice — and you couldn't speak to me when I addressed you, for fear of detection. That worried you. You knew you were being watched by Porter, and you had a confederate call me while *you* were seated in the smoking room. You had worked well with him, but his voice was not exactly like yours. Even so, for a little time I thought that you were not the one who had called me. And then I realized what you had tried to do — to make me believe that very thing. And

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I knew that you *were* the one. So I came here — for the diamonds — nine of them."

There was a little silence. The thin-lipped man said in a harsh, strained tone:

"You got to Jetmars — you scared her and — she squealed."

The Island detective shook his head. "I haven't spoken a word to her," he said steadily. "You were too worried about yourself — and too greedy. You betrayed yourself."

The thin-lipped one took his palm away from the diamonds. Jo Gar said softly:

"Please keep both arms — on the table. How many stones — are there?"

The one at the table did not speak. Jo Gar moved the gun muzzle sharply.

"Many men have died because of the stones," he reminded. "One more thief — one murderer — it would not matter too much. How many stones have you?"

The thin-lipped one said huskily, "Five — the woman has — the others. Four of them. *You* have one, Gar."

There was hatred in his voice as he used the Island detective's name. Jo said softly:

"I would not lie — where are the other four stones?"

The thin-lipped one said savagely: "I tell you — the woman in black — she has them. She would not give them all to me. She is the one who —"

The Island detective smiled coldly.

"Raise your arms," he said slowly.

He made a swift — strangely swift movement for him, as the thin-lipped one obeyed. When he stepped away from the man at the table there were five diamonds in his left palm.

"We will stay here until a certain diamond expert comes to the cabin, with the captain. When the stones have been inspected we will go to the woman in black. We will obtain the other four stones."

The phone buzzed. Jo Gar moved towards it, but did not take his eyes from the figure of the man in the chair. He spoke into the mouthpiece, as he slipped the diamonds into a pocket.

"Señor Gar —"

Porter's voice said: "Did the buzz catch you in time?"

The Island detective kept his eyes on the thin-lipped one. He said:

"Yes — it reached me in time. I was prepared for Mr. Tracy. Will you please call the captain and tell him —"

His words died as the thin-lipped one hurled himself from the chair, slashing his right arm at the Colt. Jo squeezed the trigger of the gun as it was battered to one side. There was crashing sound, and then the thin-lipped one's fingers were on his throat.

He muttered hoarse, distorted words as his fingers tightened their grip. He was strong; the swinging arms of the detective failed to hurt him. Already Jo's breath was coming in short gasps.

His head was pulled close to the thin-lipped one's body; there was a

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mist in his eyes. Blackness was coming now; he was choking terribly. He felt his body swung to one side; his head was battered against the wall of the cabin. And then, once again, the room was filled with crashing sound. The strangler's body jerked; he cried out hoarsely. His fingers went away from Jo's throat; he swung gropingly towards the cabin door. Jo stared towards it, his vision clearing. It was half opened.

Voices reached him faintly from the corridor; they grew louder. The thin-lipped one was down on his knees now; he sprawled at full length; his left hand fingers pawing at the small of his back. Then, very suddenly, he was motionless.

Jo Gar stared towards the half opened door.

"He would have killed me — and yet — he was murdered — the woman in black —"

He couldn't be sure, but he thought his eyes had seen dark color, just after the shot had crashed. And if the woman in black had thought that the thin-lipped one had said too much, if she had overheard, following him to his cabin —

Porter's voice was calling from the corridor:

"Señor Gar — Señor Gar!"

There were heavier footfalls now. Jo Gar tapped the pocket into which he had slipped the diamonds. He was sure they were real. Five of them, and there was the one he already had recovered. Six stones — with four still missing. And the one who could have told many things — he was dead.

The Island detective knew that, even before he bent over the man, calling hoarsely:

"Yes — Porter — it is — all right —"

Porter came into the room, pulling up short at the sight of the man on the floor.

"Heard the crash sound — over the phone —" he muttered.

Jo Gar straightened and smiled a little. "I was forced to shoot," he said more clearly. "But he got me by the throat —"

Ship's officers were inside the room now. The second officer stared at the figure on the floor, then at Jo.

"You shot him?" he breathed.

Jo Gar shook his head. Porter leaned down suddenly and lifted something from the floor near the doorway.

The Island detective said:

"He had five of the Von Loffler diamonds — I've got them now. I tried to shoot him, but I failed. He was shot in the back, from the corridor."

The second officer drew in a sharp breath. "You saw who it —"

Jo Gar shook his head.

The newspaper man extended a palm. "What's this?" he muttered. "Just picked it up at the door."

Jo looked at the bead in Porter's palm. He shook his head very slowly.

"It looks very much," he said huskily but with little tone, "like a bit of blue glass."

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Robert Arthur's "Hard Sheriff" was first published in "Detective Fiction Weekly," issue of September 30, 1939. In the opinion of your Editors it was not only the best detective-crime short-short story of its year but is one of the best examples of this difficult literary form ever written. We are proud and happy to reprint it.

HARD SHERIFF

by ROBERT ARTHUR

Sheriff Ben Cheever stood at the foot of the gallows and looked upward. There were thirteen steps — he had counted them a score of times — leading up to the platform where the trap was. Steep steps. Hard to climb. Especially for a man who knew he wasn't coming down them again.

Two guards were standing close by, ready to conduct the condemned man up the steps. The time was getting short. But Sheriff Ben knew how the prisoner felt. They called him a hard sheriff, one who would as soon hang a man as not, and maybe he was. But he knew, and he had never failed to give a doomed man a moment's breathing space to compose himself in, and say any last thing that was on his mind. And though this was to be the last hanging he would attend, he could see no reason to alter things today. He raised his voice slightly.

"All right, boys," he said. "No hurry."

The guards nodded, and Sheriff Ben turned. Under-sheriff Henry Wilkes, overweight and somewhat soft, but a conscientious man nevertheless, was right behind him. After today, and until election anyway, Henry Wilkes would be sheriff. Henny, Ben Cheever noticed with an absent eye, was pallid, and a fine sweat beaded his brow. Henny had never had much of a stomach for hangings. In fact, he had pleaded sick and stayed away from the two that had been held since he began to serve.

"Brace up, Henny!" Ben said reprovingly. "Don't look so hollow-legged. By rights you ought to be taking charge of this whole thing today. A hanging's just a job, like any other job."

Henny Wilkes shook his head.

"I know, Ben," he mumbled. "It's just that — well, I guess I'm not as hard a man as you are. I've got feelings."

"Feelings!" Ben Cheever snorted, and spat on the hard-packed red clay of the prison yard. "Who says I haven't got feelings? But when a job has to be done, my idea is to do it right, and keep your feelings to yourself."

Henny Wilkes mopped his fore-

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head, though the day was coolish.

"I reckon," he said with exasperation, "you might think different if you was having to help hang a friend of yours, like I am."

"Friend!" Ben said, and snorted again. "I reckon he's as good a friend to me as he is to you, Henny. That's got nothing to do with it. You been under-sheriff three years, Henny, and you ducked out of helping me with both th' hangings I've done in that time. Today, I'm going to run this one right, and I want you should take particular notice, because after today you're on your own. You'll get no more help from me."

Henny Wilkes mopped his forehead again.

"Sure, Ben," he agreed. "I know. It's only that today — and a friend —"

Sheriff Ben Cheever squared his shoulders and straightened his stout trunk of a body. His face expressed nothing.

"Never mind the friend part, Henny," he said crisply. "He killed two men, and he was found guilty by a jury and condemned to hang by the neck. That's enough for me, and it's enough for you."

He nodded to the guards.

"All right, boys," he said. "Time to move now."

The guards moved forward.

The under-sheriff put his handkerchief away and followed the little group up the steps to the platform. A high board fence had been erected around the jail yard, but there were a dozen witnesses huddled below, staring fascinatedly up at the gallows arm and the noose. And beyond the fence a little hill rose. The hill was dotted now with sightseers and even picnickers, some of them having come from a hundred miles away just for the glimpse of a hanging. It was still a pretty primitive country — one where the law needed enforcing rigorously if it was to be respected at all.

"Now, Henny," Ben Cheever said, when they were all assembled on the platform, "I'm going to make everything ready, and you watch careful."

"By grabs, Ben!" Henny Wilkes burst out, for a moment losing control of his feelings. "I think you actually *like* hangin's so much that — that — Well, dag nab it, if it wasn't for you this one needn't ever have took place! If two men ever deserved killin', it was those two sharks who wangled Dan Simmons' widow out of that oil acreage down in the south part of the county, not leaving her or the kid a red cent. Yeah, and there's some right interestin' evidence that says maybe it was them who bushwhacked Dan Simmons in the first place, too.

"Now, Dan was my friend, like he was yours, and I say for a man to go up and face them two, them being armed, and kill them with guns in their hands wasn't a crime but a public service. It didn't no more call for a hangin' than —"

Ben Cheever's expression did not change as he cut short Henny Wilkes's flow of speech.

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"Henny," he said slowly, as if it was something he had been thinking out in his own mind and had got clear at last, "I been called a hard sheriff. Because I hung a lot of men who needed hangin', and never seemed to shy none from doing it. But I've done it because I believed in law, and I figured to make the law hereabouts stick.

"I guess I've done a tol'able job. People in this county are mighty law-abidin'. Forty, fifty years ago there wasn't much law here, and less respect for it. My own dad was one of those with the least respect of all. He was a man, and I say it myself, who ought to have been hanged prompt after his first shootin' scrape. Instead, he died in bed, havin' killed eleven men, half of them anyways bein' nothing but murder, and everybody knew it.

"Maybe most kids would a been proud of havin' a bad man for a dad. I wasn't. I was ashamed. Because I see what happened to the families of some of the men he killed. And I seen other men die needlessly because my dad had killed someone and got away with it.

"Henny, when I was a boy I made up my mind to be a lawman, and a good one. I made up my mind that when a fellow like my dad came along, he'd get what my dad shoulda got and didn't. I made up my mind the law in Komo County was going to be a thing looked up to and respected.

"And I pretty well did what I made up my mind to. Komo County still ain't exactly a center of learnin' and culture, but it's decent and honest. And this killing you mention, Henny: maybe they was a justification for it. But not in law. It shoulda been handled lawful, not by a man with hate in his heart and a gun in his hand.

"And since I was, so to speak, th' only witness who seen it done, besides bein' sheriff of this county, I figured the only thing to do was to bring in th' man and tell what he done, and how I knew he went there intendin' to do it, which made it premeditated murder.

"No, never mind speakin', Henny. I'm about finished. Anyway, I know what you're gonna say. You're gonna say it was what I told the jury, and the way I told it, that made 'em bring in a guilty verdict and a hangin' sentence. You're gonna say I just about bulldozed 'em into it.

"Maybe that's true. And I don't regret it. If a man has murder in him, it's better he hang. If this one didn't, it would be th' beginning of tearing down all I built up in forty years."

He turned, and looked almost with affection out across the red acres that rolled away toward a blue sky.

Then with a deep breath he turned back to the duty at hand.

"We wasted enough time," he said, his tone moderating. "Guards, escort the prisoner onto the trap."

The guards did, and the man who was to hang stood in the center of the platform, facing out toward the watching and silent crowd below.

"Now the hood," Ben Cheever instructed crisply, and one of the guards

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placed and adjusted the black hood.

"Now gimme the noose," the sheriff requested, and with his own hands adjusted the rope around the condemned man's neck. "Watch careful, Henny. The knot has to go just so, mind. Not an inch too high or too low. There, like that. You got it, Henny?"

"I got it, Ben," Henry Wilkes said hurriedly, a little green.

"Good!" Ben grunted. "Now, guards, tie the prisoner's hands behind him. You shoulda done it before you brought him out of his cell. Next time be more careful. There, that's right. Now, Henny, go ahead. I want you should spring the trap. You're bound to have to do it sometime again, and you got to get used to it."

"I —" the under-sheriff said weakly. "I — don't hardly think I can, Ben. I —"

"*Spring the trap!*" Ben Cheever said peevishly.

With convulsive obedience Henry Wilkes's hand thrust out, the heavy lever moved, and beneath the prisoner a square of darkness seemed to leap into existence and swallow him.

Then the pudgy under-sheriff sighed deeply and mopped his forehead again, swallowing twice, very hard. It had been hard to do. If it hadn't been for Ben's iron hard will, he probably wouldn't have done it. And the hardest part was still ahead.

That part would be when he had to superintend the cutting down of Ben Cheever's body.

Because Ben wouldn't be able to help him any then.

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you:

Q. Patrick's THOU LORD SEEST ME
Cornell Woolrich's COLLARED
Stephen Vincent Benét's FLOOR, PLEASE
MacKinlay Kantor's THE TRAIL OF THE BROWN SEDAN
Hector Bolitho's DIRGE
John di Silvestro's THE BIG SHOTS

Also, another *EQMM* "first story" — *Mary Adams Sarett's* SUBJECT TO REVIEW, and an unusual "discovery" — *Thomas Bailey Aldrich's* OUT OF HIS HEAD.

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ABOUT BOOKS AND BARRIE

Sir James M. Barrie's contribution to the detective-crime-mystery short story has been surprisingly slight. There are two rather mild crime stories in MY LADY NICOTINE *(1890); a riddle story, "A Lady's Shoe," in the book of the same name (1898); the first act of an unfinished play, "Shall We Join the Ladies?" —first performed at the Royal Dramatic Academy's Theatre on March 27, 1921, and first published in Cynthia Asquith's anthology,* THE BLACK CAP *(1927); and to round out an admittedly thin 'tec tetralogy, a parody of Sherlock Holmes called "The Adventure of the Two Collaborators," first published as part of Chapter XI in Conan Doyle's autobiography,* MEMORIES AND ADVENTURES *(1924), and reprinted in Ellery Queen's suppressed anthology,* THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *(1944).*

Now, the curious thing about this quartet is that it presents far greater bibliographic problems than ratiocinative ones: or to put it another way, these four minor manhunting maneuvers have infinitely more value, interest, and excitement for the book collector than for the reader. Indeed, first editions of at least three of the four represent sizable headaches to the bibliophile.

The volume, MY LADY NICOTINE, *is quite difficult to find in first edition. True, it is no genuine rarity, but when found it will nick your pocketbook. Less than one thousand copies were printed of the first edition, and fine copies have sold in the past for as high as $450 (and inferior copies for as low as $15); it is only fair to say, also, that the demand for Barrie first editions has slumped in recent years, with a consequent substantial drop in prices even for fine copies.*

The first edition of A LADY'S SHOE, *included in pirated publications, first in 1893 and then in 1898, is also a hard book to find these lean rare-book days; and while it will not deprive you of as many dollars as* MY LADY NICOTINE, *it will not cost you pin money either.**

The Cynthia Asquith anthology, THE BLACK CAP, *containing the unfinished play, is your easiest bibliographic hurdle. First editions of both the English and American issues are fairly common, and worth your attention, since the book contains some excellent tales of murder and mystery.*

Which brings us to the Barrie burlesque . . . Let us quote Conan

* To illustrate the sheer unpredictability of book prices: just before going to press, your Editors purchased a variant first edition of A LADY'S SHOE; it cost precisely $1.

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Doyle on its bibliographic birth: "Sir James Barrie paid his respects to Sherlock Holmes in a rollicking parody. It was really a gay gesture of resignation over the failure we had encountered with a comic opera for which he undertook to write the libretto. I collaborated with him on this, but in spite of our joint efforts, the piece fell flat. Whereupon Barrie sent me a parody on Holmes, written on the flyleaves of one of his books."

If you consider the book which Barrie sent to Doyle as the true first edition of "The Adventure of the Two Collaborators," and if you aspire to owning that unique volume, you might as well hope to own the first book published on the moon! If the Barrie holograph edition still exists, there is precisely that copy and no other. And where is that copy today? Possibly in the possession of the Doyle family, perhaps moldering in some iron-bound trunk or packing case. Should the book, by a miracle, ever come up for public auction, what a fabulous price it should fetch! But, to return to our original thesis, Barrie's legacy of crime-mystery-and-detection is more apt to make a bibliomaniac tremble with desire than a reader desire to tremble.

Nevertheless, we have decided to bring you a sample of Barrie, if for no other reason than to illustrate the elfin touch in mystery. To represent the sentimental whimsy for which Barrie is so famous, we have chosen neither his tenuous crime tales, nor his unfinished play, nor his overrated Sherlockiana — Doyle, it must be confessed, showed uncritical prejudice when he rated the Barrie parody as "the best of all the numerous parodies" of Holmes; no, we have selected a typically Barriesque fairy tale which, so far as we have been able to check, has not been reprinted since the turn of the century, even in Barrie's Collected Works, including the 14-volume Peter Pan Edition of 1929. Remember, it is a 'tec truth that any story you haven't read, even if it is more than fifty years old, is a new story . . .

A LADY'S SHOE

by JAMES M. BARRIE

After it is too dark to read, save to those who will travel to their windows in search of light, a man I know is sometimes to be found in his armchair by the fire, toying with a lady's shoe. He is a bachelor — whimsical, you will say — and how that frayed shoe became his I know not; for often though he has told me, the tale is never twice the same. When such is his odd mood, he will weave me strange histories of the shoe, and if I would be sad they are sportive, and when one makes me

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merry he will give it a tragic ending, for such is the nature of the man. Sometimes he is not consistent, which, he quaintly explains, is because he has only one of the shoes; and he will argue that so-called inanimate objects accustomed to the married life, such as shoes and gloves and spectacles, mourn the loss of their mate even as Christians do, which he proves, should I smile, by asking whether, though previously hard workers, they are ever, if separated, of much more use in the world. Nor is that the only hard question he asks me; for when I tell him that all his stories of the shoe cannot be true, he demands of me which of them is necessarily false, and then I have no answer. Perhaps you, too, will be dumb to that question after you have listened to me, if such be your pleasure, while I repeat a little of what he tells me in the twilight, as we sit by the fire looking at the little bronze shoe.

A hundred and one years and six months ago, says my friend, who is scrupulously exact about dates where they are of no consequence, that shoe and her partner got their first glimpse of the world. They sat all day in a shoemaker's window in the Strand, looking out upon the great fair which human beings provide for the entertainment of the articles that have the luck to get a seat in shopkeepers' windows, instead of being hung up inside on strings, or hidden away in boxes. They were a very dainty pair, made for the feet of some Cinderella with a godmother, and many ladies stopped to look at them who passed St. Paul's. But there was a little dressmaker who loved those shoes as no other loved them, and she stood admiring them so often that they got to know her and wondered why she did not come in and buy. You see, they had as yet no knowledge of the world, and thought that a trumpery dressmaker ought to have them, just because she had such pretty little feet. They did not understand that beautiful shoes are not for feet that fit them, but for purses that can buy them.

She was not so very little, this dressmaker who hungered for the tiny bronze shoes; but she was only a girl, and she had to sew for her life all day and often all night, and that, my friend says, is why he calls her the little dressmaker. I suppose he means that she was so small compared with the big foes a poor girl has to fight in London. But though she was poor, she was not unhappy. She not only made pretty dresses out of rich material for fine ladies, such as the shoes were meant for, but pretty, cheap frocks for herself, in which she was delightful to look at. A really pretty girl always looks best in something at twopence-halfpenny the yard, and really plain ones look their worst in silk and velvet. These, be it noted, are my friend's views. The little dressmaker never quite rose to them. She often smiled with satisfaction when she saw herself in a mirror; but as often she sighed over her sewing, wishing she could see herself in the

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fine brocades that are meant for my Lady Mary. As it is the duty of all women to look as nice as possible, the little dressmaker cannot be blamed for wishing sometimes that she had five thousand a year. Had she had that sum, her first purchase would have been the shoes. She often thought of them at night, and looked at her pretty feet and counted her money, and then shook her head mournfully.

The little dressmaker had only one relative in the whole wide world, and he was a boy of twelve, six or eight years younger than herself. He was her brother, and they lived together in a shabby room that looked bright, for no other reason than because these two loved each other. Will ran errands for anyone who would employ him, and he had such an appetite that he often felt compelled to apologize for it. The little dressmaker could have bought the shoes to which she had given her heart, had she not known that the consuming desire of Will was to possess a certain magnificent knife.

"How absurd of Will," the little dressmaker often said to herself, "to want that ugly knife. What can he do with it, except cut his fingers?"

At these times she could not help comparing boys with girls, and thinking that the desires of her own sex were much more reasonable, for what could be more natural and proper than to pine for the loveliest pair of bronze shoes?

Will knew why his sister often gazed at these shoes.

"How foolish girls are!" was his comment to himself. "No sensible person could see that knife without wishing to own it; but what does it matter whether one wears pretty shoes or ugly shoes, or even no shoes at all?"

Nevertheless, those two loved each other, and Will would have liked his sister to get the shoes, if only he could get the knife as well. The little dressmaker loved Will even more than that, and was determined that he should have the knife, though she had to give up the shoes.

Can you see her at the shoemaker's window, looking at the shoes, and then at her own feet, until she felt certain that all the Strand was laughing at her? Once she went into the shop and asked the price of the shoes. She came out scared. Next day, notwithstanding, she was back at the window, with the money in her possession, and it almost compelled her to go in and buy. She had to run away. After that she left the money at home.

She tried to avoid the Strand altogether, but still her feet took her there against her will, for you cannot conceive how anxious they were to step into those little bronze shoes.

The little dressmaker, who was the most unselfish of women, despised herself for her vanity, and thought to be happy again by buying the knife without delay. Then the shoes would be beyond her reach as completely as if some great lady had bought them.

"Here is the money for the knife,

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Will," she said bravely one day, and Will grasped the money.

"But the shoes?" Will said, repressing his desire to rush out for the knife.

"I don't care about them," his sister said, turning her head away.

"It is not," Will said, uncomfortably, "as if you had no shoes. Those are nice ones you are wearing now."

They were not really nice ones. It was quite a shame that such pretty feet should be libeled by them. But these were matters which Will did not understand.

"And all one wants of shoes," he said, "is that they should have no holes in them."

"That is all," answered the little dressmaker with a courageous smile, and she spoke of the knife with such interest that Will set off to buy it, convinced that she no longer cared about the shoes. Forgetting something, however, he turned back for it, and behold, he found the little dressmaker in tears. You must not blame her. It was quite a big sacrifice she had made, and therefore, though she was crying, she was not very unhappy. Unselfishness is the best cure for trouble. Will, of course, did not realize this. He suddenly remembered that, though they were so poor, he seemed to get everything he wanted very much, while she seemed to get nothing. He was stricken with remorse, and said craftily that he wanted her to come with him to buy the knife. Well, she went with him, and presently she discovered that it was not the knife he meant to buy.

"Oh, Will," she whispered, trembling, "I won't have the shoes. I want you to get the knife."

"Pooh," said Will, grandly, "I don't care to have the knife. What use do I have for it?"

"You will make me wretched, Will," the little dressmaker said, "if you buy the shoes. These I have are quite nice ones."

"You are to have the shoes," replied Will, firmly. "No one could look so pretty in them as you will."

"Oh, Will, have you noticed?" faltered the little dressmaker, meaning had Will noticed that her feet really were made to wear lovely shoes.

"Of course I have," answered Will, not at all understanding what she was referring to.

"But I can't spend so much money on myself," she said.

"It is my money now," said Will, triumphantly, "and I am to give you the shoes as a present."

Feeling like a man, he requested her to take his arm, and so they advanced along the Strand, making quite a gallant show for such wayfarers as could read faces. Alas! they reached the shop too late. The shoes were gone. An hour earlier they had been bought by an heiress, for whom they were too small. The shopkeeper had pointed this out to her courteously, but she, too, had fallen in love with the pretty shoes, and her only answer to him was, "I buy them: I undertake to get into them." Now we must leave the

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sad little dressmaker and follow the fortunes of the shoes.

I interrupted my friend at this point, saying, "It is the little dressmaker I am interested in, not the shoes. Tell me more of her."

"She vanished out of my knowledge at that point in her history," he answered.

"A story-teller," I complained, "has no right to close his tale so abruptly. It is his duty to leave nothing to the public's imagination."

"Mine," he said, "is not a story, it is only something that happened, and I warned you that I did not know the end. In real life you never get the end of a story, but you can guess it if you will."

"Then," I said, "I guess that the little dressmaker —"

"Had more severe disappointments in after life than the loss of a pair of shoes," he said.

"But had a happy future," I broke in, almost entreating him to say the words. "When her brother became a man he gave her a pretty house in the suburbs to be mistress of, and she was as happy as —"

"As Ruth Pinch?" he suggested. "No, I think Will married, and left the little dressmaker alone in the shabby room."

"Until she married, you mean?"

"Or until," said my friend, very sadly, "she was damned to all eternity that a gentleman might have his pleasure."

"Don't say that," I implored.

"The little dressmaker is dead," he answered, "and the worms have eaten her long ago, so it does not matter much." Then he looked at me sharply: "If I cannot give the story an end," he said, "I can at least give it a moral. When I was in your house yesterday I found a pale little governess teaching your children, and I thought (forgive me) that you were somewhat brusque to her. She was the little dressmaker over again. Ah, sir, that is what I mean when I say that the stories in real life have no ending! The brave little dressmaker is still in London; you brush against her in every street, you meet her in scores of houses. Remember that little bit of her history, and you will help to make her next scene brighter. And now I must tell you of her who bought the shoes and took them to Gretna Green, and of how they entirely altered her future because they were a size too small. This time the story has an ending, or what passes for such in a world of make-believe. It is about a grandfather of mine, too, whose marriage, as you shall hear, was entirely arranged by this shoe."

Miss May Gregory, the heiress into whose possession the shoes passed, was a lovely creature on a somewhat large scale, and having only lately left school, she was desperately anxious to be married. So anxious was she that matrimony was the first consideration, and the man only the second. She had two lovers, whom she called Jack and Tom, and she

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was so fond of both that she would have married either. Her papa, who knew her pretty well, said she was a sentimental goose, and he was so feared by both Jack and Tom that when they heard his voice in the stilly night asking who was that playing the guitar beneath his daughter's window, they leaped the orchard wall and ran.

"You can't marry both," Mr. Gregory explained to Miss May; "and as they would only make a man between them, it is obvious that you marry neither. No tears, please, and let me hear less nonsense about love. Whoever heard of a girl's loving two men at once?"

Miss May thought her papa very unfeeling, and pointed out that, of course, she only loved one of them. Her tragedy was that she could not decide which one.

My own idea is that they were so very much alike that a lady could not be indifferent to the one and love the other. But I am a bachelor, and often wonder how young ladies can choose a young man out of so many young men of the same pattern and hold him higher than the rest. Financially Jack and Tom were easily distinguished, however. Jack had ready money but no prospects; Tom had prospects (he said) but no ready money. You may be sure that Miss May considered this no difference at all. She had sufficient money and prospects for both herself and her husband.

Though it was in London that Miss May bought the shoes, it was in a provincial town that she first tried to get into them — the town where she and her severe papa lived. She was going to the theatre that night, and to Gretna Green afterward, if the fates proved friendly. It was her father who was to take her to the theatre, and Jack who was to take her to Gretna Green. The arrangements had been made cleverly, as you will see.

For nearly half an hour the carriage waited at the door before Miss May was ready to step into it. When she at last joined her father, who was fuming, for he detested being late for the play, her face was red. I wish I could say that this was because she was blushing or had been crying over the impropriety of the contemplated runaway marriage. But it was not. Miss May was merely red in the face because her fight with the shoes had been protracted. She had a momentary triumph, however, for, in her own words, she had "got into them." True they pinched and made her stumble in her walk, but she had only to walk a few yards to the carriage and another few yards from the playhouse door to a box.

I have forgotten what the play was; it was, probably, one of the dull comedies that are now esteemed because they are old. Many people were crowding into the house, and in the vestibule stood Jack, who made a sign to his lady that all was well. Then he disappeared without being seen by the father he was hoodwinking. Tom was less fortunate. That is to

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say, the father did see him. He was also more fortunate, however, for he had a few moments' talk with Miss May. That lady ought not, perhaps, to have let Tom know that she was coming to the play tonight. She was really Jack's now, or about to be, if the plot did not miscarry. But was it not natural that she should feel sorry for Tom? That day she had sent him back his letters (he used to slip them into her hands, and she kept them in a box beside Jack's letters), with an intimation that all was over between them. She had also added that she was going to the play that night, and I suppose her reason for this injudicious act was that she looked forward to a delightfully sad parting with him. But Miss May had not quite understood Tom. In the crush at the theatre she held out her hand (the one farther from her papa) that Tom might squeeze it surreptitiously. Thus did she hope to break the blow. But frantic Tom would have none of her hand. He stalked after her into the box, and in the presence of her father demanded an explanation. Miss May, who was already beginning to wish that she had never seen those lovely little bronze shoes — they were hurting her so much — wept at Tom's grief and admired him for his vehemence. As for the father, he was first amazed, secondly delighted, and thirdly afraid. It was pleasant to him to hear that his daughter was determined to be done with the youth, but disquieting to observe that the whole house was listening to Tom's declamation. Tom promising to lower his voice, papa consented to leave the box for five minutes that the farewells might take place in privacy.

In that five minutes the second act of a tragedy was played in the back of the box. Tom announced that his prospects were now death by his own pistol. Miss May, in terror, put her hands on his shoulders; and then, remembering Jack, withdrew them. She had promised Jack not to say a word of the conspiracy to Tom, but now it all came out. At half-past nine a written note was to be handed in to Miss May, purporting to come from an aunt of hers who was in a box beneath. The note was to ask her and her papa to join the aunt. Papa loathed the aunt, and was therefore certain to refuse; but he would let Miss May go. In the lobby she was to be joined by Jack, whisked into a carriage that was already waiting near the theatre door, and borne off in the direction of Gretna Green. There was quite a chance of the runaways being twenty miles off before the chase began.

"So farewell, Tom, dear Tom," said Miss May. But dear Tom, forgetting his promise to papa, began to stamp, calling her the most horrid names, and thus delighting her.

"You know how I could love you," she said, picking her tenses carefully. "But am I to blame if you are so poor?"

"You could wait for me. My prospects —"

"I can't wait, Tom. Goodbye.

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Kiss me, Tom, for the last time."

"I won't. You are a heartless coquette. May, if that carriage had been mine, would you have come with me?"

"I — I don't know."

Men should not distress women with such difficult questions.

"Kiss me, Tom, for the last time."

"I won't."

Then, like a sensible man, Tom changed his mind, and kissed her passionately.

"It is not for the last time," he said, fiercely. "May, you love me, and me alone, and Jack shall not have you; he shall not. I have an idea; quick, tell me how I shall know Jack's carriage?"

Miss May, wondering, had just begun to answer him, when papa reappeared. Tom departed, but not with the look of a hopeless man on his face. As for the young lady, having treated dear Tom so kindly, she naturally began to think lovingly of dear Jack.

The ruse with the letter succeeded. Miss May was trembling a little when she left the box. Had her papa flung her a kind word just then she might have postponed the elopement; but he asked her grumpily why she was looking at him so sentimentally, and, of course, after that she hesitated no longer. He little thought as the door closed on her that the next time they met she would be a married woman.

Miss May always maintained afterward that from the moment when she left her father's box until she realized that she was in a carriage beside Jack, all was a blank to her. The theatre attendant, however, who saw the carriage drive off, and described the scene subsequently to the infuriated father, declared that she was less agitated than her lover.

"I suppose Jack carried me down that dark street to the carriage," was Miss May's surmise.

"The gentleman was a little excited-like, but the lady she were wonderful cool," was the attendant's declaration. His story ended thus: "They had started, when the lady she gave a scream, and the carriage stopped, and the gentleman he jumped out and looked for something in the street. He got it, too, and then he jumps in beside her again, and off they go at a spanking rate. I don't know what it was; something she had dropped, most likely."

To his dying day this man was denied the small pleasure of knowing what Jack jumped out of the carriage to pick up. It was one of the shoes. Miss May's feet had been protesting so vigorously in the theatre against further confinement in their narrow prison house that with one foot she had pressed the shoe half off the other. In the street the shoe fell off and Jack had to find it, for although in Scotland one may marry in a hurry, one's feet must be properly shod. So Miss May thought then, but she was presently to discover that a pair of shoes are a convenient possession rather than indispensable.

Through the greater part of the

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night the carriage rolled northward, but at last an inn (now, I believe, a private house) was reached, where they had to wait three hours for fresh horses. Miss May had a bedroom, but did not sleep a wink (she said), while the nervous Jack paced up and down in front of the inn, listening for horses in pursuit, and thinking he heard them every five minutes.

If a man can be too gentlemanly, that man seems to have been Jack throughout this escapade. Until he could claim her as his wife, he would not take even what she called formal liberties. He sat on the seat opposite her. He paid her no compliments. He addressed her as Miss Gregory, which had not been his custom. Of course, she admired this delicacy, but still —

The journey was resumed with early light, and now, as they stepped once more into their carriage, both of the runaways looked hard at one of the postilions.

"Surely, you are not the man I engaged yesterday?" Jack said to him.

"No, my lord," answered the fellow, composedly, "he were took ill, and offered me his place. No offense intended, my lord. I have been on this here kind of job before."

"You have been to Gretna Green before?"

"Raythe r."

"You will do as well as another. Drive on."

Miss May said nothing to the man, but she thought a good deal about him. Despite his dark hair and sallow complexion, despite his boorish manners, she thought him very like Tom. And, indeed, it was Tom — in disguise. He had bribed the real postilion, and here he was on his way to Scotland with the woman he wanted to marry, but by no means certain how he was to get her.

Within twenty miles of the border there is a hillock which commands an extensive view. It is close to the old high road, and many a man bound for Gretna Green has run up to it to see whether his pursuers were in sight. Jack was one of the number. He was not gone many minutes, but in the meantime Tom had found an opportunity of revealing himself to the lady.

"May," he said, appearing so suddenly by her side that she screamed, "don't you know me? I am Tom. May, dearest, you said you would marry me if I could take you to Scotland. I am doing it."

"Oh, Tom!" wailed Miss May, all in a tremble (as she said afterwards), "I never made any such promise. I am to marry Jack."

"Never!" cried Tom. "May, darling May —"

"Tom, Tom!" said Miss May, reproachfully, "why did you come to disturb my peace of mind."

"Love of my life!" began Tom, then kissed her hand and resumed his seat beside the other postilion. He had seen Jack running back.

"We are pursued," Jack said, as he drew near, panting, "by two men on horseback, and one of them, I am convinced, is your father."

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The carriage rolled on more quickly now than ever, and for the next half-hour Miss May thought little of which of her lovers she should marry. Her new fear was that she would not be able to marry at all. Jack was as polite as ever. Certainly Tom had been less delicate. He had called her his darling, he had kissed her hand. He should not have taken these liberties, but still —

In vain were the horses of the runaways whipped up. The pursuers gained on the carriage until, when the latter was within half a mile of the border, they were not four hundred yards behind.

"There is only one chance for us, May," said poor Jack, forgetting in his excitement that she was not May, but Miss Gregory; "we must leave the carriage at the next turn of the road which hides us from view."

"And be overtaken in a moment!" cried Miss May, aghast.

"I hope not," said Jack. "Listen, dear, to what I propose. At the next turn I will stop the carriage, and you will at once jump out with me. I will tell our fellows to drive on as fast as they can, and you and I will conceal ourselves until your father and his companion have galloped past. They will pursue the carriage. In the meantime, you and I will cross these fields to the village, whose lights I see plainly, and there the blacksmith will marry us."

"They will overtake the carriage in a few minutes," the lady said, "and finding it empty, hurry on to Gretna Green. Why, we shall find them waiting for us there."

"We shall not," answered Jack, triumphantly, with his head out at the window. "I see two roads before us, of which the one evidently leads to Gretna Green, and the other to the right. I will tell our fellows to take the latter; that will give us a good start."

Jack stopped the carriage and assisted his lady out, at the same time shouting directions to the two men. "Stop!" he cried to them, as they were driving off. "One of you come with me; we may need a witness." Tom jumped down. The carriage drove on. The two men and the woman hid. The horsemen, of whom Mr. Gregory was purple with passion, raced by them.

"And now for Gretna Green on foot!" said Jack, giving Miss May his arm.

They hurried on, but — *the shoe!* Miss May had this time no maid to help her, and the shoe was but half on. She was sliding her foot along the ground, rather than lifting it. By and by, when they were not a hundred yards from the old toll-house, which is just on the other side of the border, Miss May sank to the ground, crying, "I can go no farther — I have lost one of my shoes!"

There was no time to look for the shoe in the twilight.

"Assist her to that cottage," said Jack to the supposed postilion, pointing to the toll-house, "and I will hasten on to the village and bring

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the blacksmith back with me. Ask them to hide her, if need be. You will be well paid."

So saying, Jack ran on, while Tom obeyed his injunctions to the letter. With Miss May's assistance he explained the position to the toll-keeper, who grinned when he heard that the bridegroom was running to Gretna Green for the blacksmith.

"You English," he said, "think that there is but one man in broad Scotland who can make a couple one in a hurry, and you call him the blacksmith, though he is no blacksmith at all. If your lover, honey, had stopped here, I should have had you spliced by this time."

"Is that true?" cried Tom.

"I have married scores in my time," the old man answered. "Why, I married half a dozen this week!"

"But is it legal?" asked May.

The toll-keeper smiled.

"Try it, honey," he suggested.

Then it was Tom's turn to speak.

"May," he said, in a tone of conviction, "this is providential. Old gentleman, marry us as quickly as you can. Get your family as witnesses, if witnesses are necessary."

The toll-keeper looked at the lady.

"No, no," she said, "I promised Jack. Oh, Tom, how I wish there had been only one of you!"

For half an hour did Miss May refuse to listen to what Tom called reason. Then she started up, for she was sure she heard the gallop of horses.

"Tom!" she cried.

So she and Tom were married. Jack and Mr. Gregory arrived at the toll-house five minutes afterward, but it was all over by that time.

Thus my friend ended his story, adding that his grandfather had come out of the affair victorious.

"So your grandfather was Tom?"

"If," he replied, coolly, "you think Tom was the victor."

"Well, he got her."

"And Jack did not. But perhaps Jack was the luckier man of the two."

"Then was Jack your grandfather?"

"I won't say. I leave it to you to decide which was victorious, the one who got her or the one who lost her."

"It must have been Tom. You told me that your grandfather's marriage was entirely arranged by a shoe."

"Yes, I said so, but both of their marriages were arranged by a shoe, for Jack subsequently married another lady and, of course, it was the shoe that led to his marrying her instead of Miss May."

"At least," I said, "tell me which of the two shoes this is."

"That would be telling all," he replied, "for Tom retained possession of the shoe in which Miss May was married, and Jack found the other one next morning. To tell you which shoe this is would be to tell you which man was my grandfather. Can't you guess? I have told you he was the one who had reason to be thankful that the lady became Mrs. Tom. Now, which one was that?"

Reader, which do you think?

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Floyd Mahannah's "Ask Maria" is one of the eleven "first stories" purchased from new writers in last year's contest. It reveals the narrative strength, the sound detection, and the sincerity of approach which so impressed your Editors last year that we awarded more than one-third of the total number of prizes to writers who had not previously had any work published.

Mr. Mahannah was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1911, moved to California in 1926, and has lived there since. He contracted the scribbler's itch about twelve years ago when he was feature editor of the Long Beach Junior College "Viking." After college he piddled away at writing, while working as a truck driver, bookkeeper, paper-bag maker, stock clerk, and aircraft tool-planner. Three years ago, with a little money in the bank, he decided "to jump into the writing business with both feet." Luckily, Mr. Mahannah tells us, his wife is a schoolteacher; otherwise, they would have starved.

Yes, those are the conditions which prevail . . . but real writers — not mere dilettantes or star-struck amateurs — have what it takes; they don't know when they're licked; they persevere through knell and high slaughter . . .

Mr. Mahannah's first attempts came back to him so fast he could hardly believe the editors had had time to read them. That was when he realized that if he wanted to be a writer, he would first have to learn to write. He estimated it would take a year; it is now three years and he is not out of the woods yet. (The question remains: No matter how successful one becomes, does one ever come to the end of just learning?)

Mr. Mahannah's "Ask Maria" is the first work he has sent out in a long time. Its appearance in EQMM proves that Mr. Mahannah, if he has not learned all he set out to learn, is at least learning well . . .

ASK MARIA

by FLOYD MAHANNAH

JEFFERSON McCLUSKEY was seated in his sunny breakfast room, enjoying his orange juice and getting the local news roundup from Maria, his Mexican housekeeper.

A surprising quantity of news was fabricated daily by the less than two thousand souls that populated the desert town of Piñon. But more surprising was wrinkled, coffee-colored

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Maria's uncanny knowledge of every scrap of that news.

Headlines today were the tangled marital affairs of the Morenos, to which McCluskey gave less than half an ear. He was enjoying the sunshine and getting a wicked pleasure out of thinking it would be a raw January day in New York. There would be slush in the streets, a razor cut to the wind, and the usual fine fury in the Homicide Division. He sighed happily and helped himself to the scrambled eggs and bacon. Maria rattled on:

"Sally Devlin did not come home last night. Not until after daylight."

"Eh?" McCluskey looked up. He hadn't the slightest idea who Sally Devlin was. "What did her father say about that?"

Maria's verbal stream halted in mid-flood. Her black eyes, bright as a bird's, peered delightedly over her shoulder and the rest of her face became a mask.

Too late McCluskey realized she had caught him again. It was a game with her. Unprompted Maria would parade the strife and woe of all Piñon past an inattentive McCluskey; but at his first show of interest the subject of his curiosity became a secret no amount of persuasion could drag out of her. McCluskey grinned at his mistake and returned to his eggs.

A few minutes later Maria resumed the newscast while washing the dishes. There was a delicious scandal involving young Tonio Alvarez and one of the Torremala girls; and it seemed that Mr. Frankhauser, the butcher, was a pig rustler — had stolen some of the raw material for his sausages.

"Sam Brainard was killed last night with a pick through his head."

McCluskey started imperceptibly. Good Lord, a murder in this sleepy desert town! He realized Maria was eyeing him expectantly and he dropped three lumps of sugar in his coffee.

"Lots of ice-pick murders where I come from," he said off-handedly, stirring his coffee.

"Not ice-pick. Big pick." Maria made a swinging motion of chopping wood. "In the front of his head and out the back a little."

McCluskey showed less than polite interest, so Maria added, "Pecos Thompson has run away. It is said he is the killer."

McCluskey ignored Maria to the point of rudeness, but she offered nothing further on the subject. Instead, she debated the mystery of Mrs. Tincher's vanished chickens and described in detail the joy of the Figueroas' shiny new white toilet that flushed and everything. McCluskey finished the coffee, lighted his pipe, and finally adjourned to the garden.

None of his business. He was retired, and glad of it. Besides, there was an euphorbia in his garden ready for transplanting. Some of that new plant vitamin might ease the strain of readjustment. His mind drifted cheerfully into the byways of horticulture.

Two hours later with the euphorbia safely tucked into its new bed, a

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pleasantly perspiring McCluskey was looking forward to a glass of cold orange joice, when a heavy voice interrupted his exertions.

"Howdy, Inspector."

A frown creased McCluskey's forehead and he looked up. "Hello, Sheriff. And don't call me Inspector. I'm just a plain citizen, thank God."

"All right, don't ruffle your feathers." Lanky Pete Ford, sheriff of Deadrock County, stood six feet tall slouched as he was, and six-feet-six on the rare occasions when he straightened out his loose-hung frame. He teetered on his boots' high heels and surveyed the freshly turned soil before which McCluskey knelt. "Mud pies?"

"Transplanting an euphorbia."

"Euph — that weed?"

"Yes," McCluskey said drily. "That weed. How about some orange juice, Sheriff?"

"Sure. If you got nothing stronger."

McCluskey had nothing stronger; so a few minutes later they sat in the shade of the verandah, orange juice in hand and a sweat-beaded pitcher of it on the table beside them.

Sheriff Ford set down his glass, frowned at it, and got to the point. "Mighty interesting thing came up this morning."

"That so?"

"Right in your line."

"Euphorbias? A new variety?"

"Naw. I mean your real line, homicide."

"Look," McCluskey began patiently, as if covering ground previously traversed many times, "homicide is not my line. I'm citizen Jeff McCluskey. Thirty years I breathed, ate, and slept homicide. I was sick of it the first year and I got ten times sicker every year after that. You wouldn't believe how sick I am of homicide."

The sheriff listened respectfully, said, "Sure. Sick of it myself sometimes. But this case is different."

"They're all different. Doggone it, Pete, after three years out here I'm beginning to feel like a normal man again. I enjoy the sunshine, my garden, my books, and my friends. I'm happy here." McCluskey ran a hand through his stiff, gray hair. "So what do you do? You drag in the bleeding corpse of Sam Brainard. Foul my whole day with the vision of a pick driven through a man's skull with the point sticking out the back. Pecos Thompson is missing, you think he did it. I don't know Pecos Thompson. I don't know Sam Brainard. I don't want to know them or about them."

The sheriff sat open-mouthed through the speech. Then thoughtfully he fished a plug of tobacco from his vest.

"Looks like you know most of it already," he said wonderingly. "But as to Pecos Thompson, he's a fine old man. A little high-tempered maybe, but as fine a man as you'd want to know."

"I don't want to know him."

"Now Sam Brainard and Pecos used to be partners in the old days. Prospected all over this country, until

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one time they had a little tiff. Nothing they wouldn't have patched up as usual except while they still weren't speaking Sam Brainard struck it rich. Of course, he wanted to bury the hatchet and deal Pecos in for half, but Pecos was too proud to remake the partnership after Brainard was rich. That made Sam Brainard mad and the upshot was they both swore never to speak to each other again. That was twenty years ago."

Sheriff Ford looked sideways at McCluskey who was staring moodily at his garden. The sheriff shifted his chew and continued.

"Sam Brainard lived in a big place over on Parched River, alone except for a flighty nephew, Courtney Brainard, and a Mexican servant, Juan Mendez. We don't know exactly what happened yesterday because there were no witnesses. It was the Mexican's day off, and young Courtney Brainard spent the afternoon and most of the evening at the dude ranch over at Cactus City. Neither of them saw Pecos Thompson at all.

"But it appears that Pecos did pay a call on Brainard and — judging by the bottles — there was considerable drinking. Along about sundown Pecos' pick was driven into Sam's head and he died right quick. Pecos disappeared with his burro and equipment, which makes him the logical suspect. Only I can't see him doing a thing like that. Liquor always made him friendly. . . . Of course," the sheriff went on, "I know you ain't interested in all this, but Pecos is my personal friend. Like I said he's a fine man."

The sheriff turned his head a little and spat with the negligent accuracy of forty years' practice. The brown stream missed the low rail by an inch and landed in a pot containing one of McCluskey's prize cacti. It was a good shot — ten feet in the air — but McCluskey scarcely noticed it. He set down his glass.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Have a look at things," Pete Ford said. "Then tell me if you think it's possible Pecos Thompson didn't do it."

"All right," McCluskey sighed, rising. "We may as well have a go at it."

Sheriff Ford spat a triumphant squirt at the cactus and followed Jefferson McCluskey.

McCluskey was prepared to see a big house, but not one in such absolutely good taste as Sam Brainard's home. Brainard must have hired some excellent architects and decorators to turn out the low, cool house of whitewashed adobe, built around a central patio shaded by trees and palms. The windows were large, the furniture massively good, and in the shaded patio a fountain tinkled amid the greenery. The sheriff gave McCluskey little time to appreciate the structure.

"The body was lying here." The sheriff indicated a rough chalk outline on the red-tiled walk of the patio. "We removed the body this morning. The medical examiner says death oc-

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curred between four o'clock and seven o'clock yesterday afternoon. This is the murder weapon."

McCluskey took the heavy pick, noting the dark stain on the sharp end and the initials P. T. burned into the handle.

"Fingerprints?"

"Nothing usable," the sheriff told him.

"How about the rest of the house?"

"The boys are still working on it."

McCluskey nodded absent-mindedly. Some of the easy-going good humor had left his face. He was no longer a pleasant, red-faced Irishman with gray hair and a comfortably padded midsection. His voice was sharper and his questions a little peremptory.

His eyes swept the patio. The wicker chairs, one of them overturned; two glasses, one on the table and one broken on the tiles; the fountain with its water plants among which floated two empty bottles, and on the bottom of which lay another bottle nearly full, around which the goldfish swam. McCluskey rolled up a sleeve and retrieved the bottle from the bottom of the pool, holding it carefully by two fingers.

"No need to be careful," the sheriff said. "We already checked it. No prints at all. I just put it back so you could see everything as it was."

McCluskey looked at the bottle. The water-loosened label came off in his hand. The label said *Old Panther*.

"Here, I can use a little of that." The sheriff reached for the bottle, uncorked it, tipped, and swallowed four times. His face got red, his eyes bulged a little, and he didn't breathe for about twenty seconds; and when he did his breath came out in a long whoosh. The *Panther* had sharp claws.

"The nearest thing to old-fashioned redeye that's made today," the sheriff explained. "Oldtimers like Sam and Pecos like to taste their liquor. Do myself."

McCluskey walked through the house, pausing in the big kitchen where a stoop-shouldered Mexican was mopping the floor. The Mexican's cheek bore a large purplish bruise; his lip was cut and his eyes were bloodshot. He glanced once at McCluskey and went on stolidly with his mopping.

"Juan Mendez," the sheriff told McCluskey. "He spent his day off as usual — getting drunk. Last seen yesterday afternoon about three o'clock in the Mexican quarter where they say he had nearly a full load. He says he wandered out of town with a bottle of vino and ended up in the dry wash of Parched River, under a willow tree about half a mile from here. Says he finished the bottle and went to sleep there. Woke up some time after midnight, staggered home here, and fell into bed in his room out behind the garage. He saw nothing, heard nothing, and knows nothing."

"Where did he get the bruise?"

"They say he didn't have it when he left the cantina. Juan doesn't know where he got it, says his jaw is sore too. If he got them from Sam Brain-

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ard, that might be a motive for murder."

Juan Mendez gave the sheriff a smouldering glance and went on mopping.

"The wine bottle," McCluskey said. "Was it under the willow?"

"Yep. The deputy found it where Juan said. Empty."

McCluskey turned away from the door. "Where does Courtney Brainard sleep?"

"In here." The sheriff led the way. "He isn't here right now. Went into town. Said he didn't want to be in the house for a while. Acted like he was really broken up."

"Was it he who found the body?"

"No. Juan found it. Courtney said he came home about midnight and went right to bed without seeing anyone. He's not such a bad young fellow, except he was always mighty free with money and liquor for a guy who didn't have a dime of his own."

"Was he in money trouble?"

"None we know of," the sheriff said. "He says not. Sam was always generous with him. Sam had no other kin and Courtney is his heir, of course. That gives him a possible motive."

McCluskey looked around the room. There were several pictures of girls on the wall, a picture of a football team, and a pair of crossed fencing foils. The bed was rumpled and McCluskey moved closer to study it — rumpled but not creased the way sheets get when they're slept on. He looked in the closet, under the bed, behind the chest, then in the bureau drawers. There were clean pajamas in the drawer but none elsewhere.

"Courtney Brainard said he spent the afternoon and evening at Cactus City?"

"That's right. There's a dude ranch there, a bar, a good café, and in the evening usually a poker game. He says he spent the afternoon riding, took a swim in the pool, then spent the evening playing poker. We're checking the story."

The sheriff and McCluskey wandered through the rest of the rooms, checked the burro tracks that led across the dry wash to be lost in the broken rocks of the hills, and finally they returned to the patio and sat in the wicker chairs amid the cool greenery and the quiet splashing of the fountain. McCluskey broke the silence.

"When did Pecos come into town?"

"Yesterday about noon. He stopped at the courthouse a little after one o'clock and then came out here."

"Why the courthouse?"

"To see Ben Devlin, the recorder."

"Ben Devlin." McCluskey's mind groped for a memory. "That would be Sally Devlin's father?"

The sheriff eyed him quizzically. "You get around, don't you?"

McCluskey nodded. "Why did Pecos stop to see Ben Devlin?"

"To tell him he drew another blank." The sheriff saw McCluskey's puzzled frown, and explained. "Ben Devlin grubstaked Pecos on this trip. We've all grubstaked the old man at one time or another, mostly because

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we like him. A hundred bucks will feed him a month or two while he knocks around the hills. If he strikes it rich, one of us is in for half. I've staked him several times myself."

"Hm. Did Pecos tell Devlin he was going to see Brainard?"

"Nope. Just told Ben he picked up a few colors but nothing worth following."

"I see." McCluskey pulled out the thin, white-gold watch the force had given him when he retired. "After twelve. Let's go over to my place and get something to eat."

"Right." As the sheriff rose, a burly man in uniform entered the patio. The sheriff said, "Hello, Nichols. Pick up anything?"

"I picked up plenty." Nichols wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, then wiped the sweatband inside his cap. "The folks over at Cactus City didn't see young Courtney Brainard at all yesterday."

"Well," the sheriff said, brightening, "now we're getting some place. Where is Courtney now?"

"That's the funny part. He's over at Cactus City right now. I didn't know whether you wanted him hauled in or not."

"No, we'll go over there and see him. How about it, Jeff? We can eat there. It's only about fifteen miles."

McCluskey put on his hat. "Let's go."

Cactus City, a green artificial oasis, modern as a Hollywood movie, was part of a dude ranch catering to the wealthier class of dudes. The café had sliding glass panels opening onto a green garden which had a fountain around which were tables on the close-cropped grass. There's something about grass and fountains in the desert country, McCluskey thought. Out here nothing is more beautiful than grass and water.

Sheriff Ford looked over the garden and led McCluskey around the fountain to where a young man and a woman sat at a table. The man was tall, lean, and dark; the girl red-headed and crisply fresh in a green sleeveless frock. They were talking earnestly and the girl looked unhappy. When she glanced up and saw the sheriff she started.

"Hello, Sally," the sheriff said, "and Courtney. This is a friend of mine, Jeff McCluskey."

The young man gave McCluskey a cool nod and Sally gave him a smile that wasn't quite a smile because her lips were trembling. She had some nice freckles across her nose and her eyes were gray-green.

The sheriff said, "Court, we'd like to talk to you a minute. Alone. Do you mind, Sally? We'll just go inside at the bar."

Sally shook her head as Courtney Brainard rose. He was several inches taller than McCluskey's five-feet-ten, and his long face had straight clean lines. His eyes were steady and except for the strain about his mouth he seemed at ease.

Suddenly McCluskey had a hunch.

"Go ahead," he told the sheriff.

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"I'll just stay here and keep Miss Devlin company."

The sheriff looked puzzled but he went inside with Courtney Brainard. McCluskey and Sally Devlin sat in momentary silence.

At last Sally said, "Is it — is it about his uncle's death?"

"I think so." McCluskey's smile could be very reassuring when he wanted it to be, and it was reassuring now. He was noticing her restless hands, the tiny pulse beating at the side of her throat, and around that throat a thin golden chain that disappeared into the bosom of her dress.

She asked, "Has Pecos Thompson been found yet?"

"No."

"Has anything new come up about the — about Court's uncle?"

"Sally, I'm going to be a little rude. I'm going to answer a question with another question. Where were you last night?"

"Why — I was out with Court until nearly midnight." Her fingers ran nervously along the thin gold chain. McCluskey leaned forward and accidentally pushed her purse off the table. They both bent over and as Sally reached for the purse, the gold chain slipped out of the neck of her dress and a shiny circle swung at the end of it for a second before she caught it. McCluskey picked up the purse and Sally slipped the chain back inside her dress.

"And after midnight," McCluskey said, "did Court go home?"

"I — I suppose so."

"Just one more question," McCluskey smiled. "When were you and Courtney married?"

Sally's eyes flew wide. "Who said we were married?"

"The wedding ring on that chain. Married last night, weren't you?"

Sally looked down at her hands clasped tightly on the table. "Yes."

"So neither you nor Courtney were at home last night?"

"No. We stayed at a hotel."

"Why did Courtney tell the sheriff he slept at home?"

"It is supposed to be a secret."

"The marriage?"

"Yes. You see, Dad doesn't like Court. And I'm not graduated from college yet." The words were coming with a rush now. "Dad is awfully set on my finishing college and I didn't want to hurt him. But Court and I are very much in love and it didn't seem like we could wait any longer; so we were married last night in Nevada. We were going to keep it a secret until I graduate in June. Court was going to move to Berkeley so we could be together, then this summer we would tell everybody. Maybe I could win Dad over by that time. Is that wrong, Mr. McCluskey?"

"I guess not," McCluskey said. "But tell me, were you with Courtney yesterday afternoon between four and seven?"

"No." Reluctantly.

"Know where he was?"

"He drove to Julianburg to buy a wedding ring. He was gone from three thirty until nearly eight o'clock."

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"How far away is Julianburg?"

"Eighty miles or so."

"Why drive so far for a ring?"

"Because," Sally explained, "if he bought the ring here in Pinon, the wedding wouldn't be a secret."

"I see. Is that the ring you have there?"

"No. The stores were closed when Court got to Julianburg."

"Then where did you get the ring?"

"The minister who married us had a few rings he kept for such emergencies."

"Um." McCluskey made a steeple of his fingers. "Then Courtney has no alibi for the hours between four and seven?"

"No. For that matter, neither do I. I was packing to go back to school tomorrow. Does that mean I'm under suspicion too?"

"I guess not," McCluskey said. "But I'm afraid you can't keep your marriage a secret now."

She shook her head. "I don't care. I love Court."

"One other thing," McCluskey said, "has puzzled me since early this morning. What did your father say when you didn't get home until after daylight?"

"He didn't say anything. I slipped in without waking him."

In the sheriff's car rattling back to Piñon, Sheriff Pete Ford said, "I should have arrested him."

"Courtney?"

"Yes. He's got absolutely no alibi."

"Neither have I," McCluskey pointed out. "Nor has the girl, nor Juan Mendez, nor Pecos Thompson, and I'll bet you haven't one either."

The sheriff said, "I was half a mind to arrest him right there. He even gave me a motive."

"Gave you a motive?"

"He let it slip that his uncle was drawing up a new will putting his money in trust so that Courtney would get only five hundred a month the rest of his life. The estate was to go to Courtney's children, if any."

"I see," McCluskey said softly. "Why didn't you arrest him?"

"I guess it was him getting married like that. A man wouldn't kill his uncle and marry a nice girl like Sally on the same day. It wouldn't be natural."

"I knew a man once," McCluskey said, "who killed a bank teller to steal five thousand dollars on Saturday morning, was married that afternoon, cut his bride's throat that night, and threw her body in the river early next morning. And we arrested him at noon coming out of church."

"Golly," said the sheriff.

"Yep." McCluskey's face was turned so the sheriff couldn't see his grin. "Anybody can be a murderer but lack of an alibi doesn't make him one. Incidentally, Pete, where were you between four and seven yesterday?"

"Oh, I left the office about four thirty. I went home and fiddled around, took a bath, read the paper until the Missus got home from her

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Women's Club at about six thirty."

"Anybody see you at home between four thirty and six thirty?"

"Well, no. But if I had killed him, would I have asked you to help me catch the killer?" Then he saw McCluskey's face. "Blast you!" the sheriff roared. "You trying to hang this on me?"

"Now, now," soothed McCluskey. "I'm just pointing out you can't hinge this case on alibis. Nobody has one."

"All right," snorted Sheriff Ford. "Does that mean you think Courtney Brainard is innocent?"

"I don't know," McCluskey admitted. "Pecos Thompson is still our best suspect. Where does he live when he isn't prospecting?"

"In a shack over against the foothills. Pinon was his mail address."

"You said he had been gone nearly three months. Did he call for his mail yesterday?"

The sheriff snapped his fingers. "Never thought of that. We'll stop and see Lafe Pettibone."

Lafe Pettibone, Piñon's postmaster, was old and thin as a bent reed. He was slow of movement and economical of speech, as if every gesture and word were doled out of a too-slender store.

"No," was his answer to Sheriff Pete Ford's question.

"Well, that's that," the sheriff said.

McCluskey addressed the postmaster. "When did Pecos Thompson last receive mail?"

"Last October first. As usual."

"As usual?"

"That's right," the sheriff explained. "Pecos has a small annuity, a hundred bucks or so that some relative left him. He gets it on the first of October every year."

McCluskey smiled. There were few secrets in a small town. "That was three months ago," he said. "Wasn't there any other mail since then?"

Pettibone shook his head.

The sheriff looked at McCluskey and shrugged. "Where to now?"

"I guess," said McCluskey, "we'll talk to Ben Devlin and then I'm going home. I've got a headache."

"Getting one myself. Ben's office is across the street."

Ben Devlin's office was in the county courthouse, a seventy-year-old structure of semi-dressed red sandstone with wooden floors and creaky stairs leading to the recorder's office on the second floor.

"Howdy, Ben." The sheriff pushed through the battered gate in the counter. "Want you to meet Jeff McCluskey, friend of mine."

Ben Devlin started to rise but settled back and extended a hand instead.

"Glad to know you." Ben Devlin was a stocky man with a fringe of reddish hair around his nearly bald head at the level of his ears. He had a wide Irish face and gray-green eyes like Sally. His shirt sleeves, rolled to the elbows, showed powerful red-haired arms; and his handshake was firm and friendly. He waved at a

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couple of chairs and the sheriff and McCluskey sat down.

"McCluskey is helping me with this Brainard thing," the sheriff told Devlin. "I'd like you to tell him what you told me about Pecos."

"Well," said Devlin, "there isn't much to tell. He came in here about three o'clock yesterday afternoon to tell me he hadn't had any luck this trip. He'd been over in the Tavawatz Range and had turned up a few signs in the Bellows Creek area, but nothing worth developing. We talked half an hour or so, mostly about prospecting. He asked me if I wanted to grubstake him again on a trip into Furnace Hills, but I said no, I was a little short of cash. He didn't seem disappointed, but then he never did. When he left he said he thought he knew where he could get a stake."

"Did he say anything about getting it from Sam Brainard?"

"No. Sam's name wasn't mentioned."

"I see," McCluskey said. "What did you do the rest of the afternoon and evening, Mr. Devlin?"

Devlin looked surprised. "Why, I closed the doors here at four, did a little extra work that took me nearly to five, then I went home, took a shower and waited until about six thirty when Sally got home and fixed supper. Sally is my daughter, you know. My wife is dead."

McCluskey nodded.

"After supper," Devlin continued, "Sally and I sat around talking and listening to the radio until it was time for her to get ready to go out. Young Brainard came over a little after eight and Sally and he went out — to a movie, they said. I went to bed about eleven."

"What time did Sally get home?"

"I don't know exactly. I didn't hear her come in. I woke up about six thirty this morning and she was asleep in her room."

McCluskey rose from his chair. "That about covers it. Thanks for going over it with us again."

"Not at all," Devlin assured him. "Any line on Pecos yet?"

"Nothing yet," the sheriff said, getting up.

Ben Devlin started to rise also, and again changed his mind. "My blasted knee," he explained, his brow wrinkled with pain. "I twisted it again."

"That's bad," sympathized the sheriff. "Well, see you again, Ben."

"Sure."

Outside McCluskey looked at his watch. "Three o'clock. I've had enough for today."

"I'll drive you home." The sheriff buckled his long frame into the car. "How do things look to you now?"

"A mess."

The sheriff nodded. "I kinda thought you'd tell Ben about Sally being married to young Courtney."

"That's Sally's business."

"Guess you're right."

The ride to McCluskey's house was a silent one, the two men sitting in frowning preoccupation. When the car stopped at McCluskey's door he got out. "Want to come in for a

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glass of orange juice?" he invited.

"Nope," the sheriff said. "Too much of that stuff gives me the hives. I got some beer at home. Besides, I want to swear in some more deputies if we're going to have to comb Pecos out of the hills."

McCluskey nodded soberly. "Where would a murderer be most likely to hide a body in the desert?"

"Whose body?"

"Anybody's body."

"Bury it, I guess." The sheriff eyed McCluskey curiously. "But it would have to be planted deep and rocks put on top, so the coyotes wouldn't dig it up."

"That would take a lot of digging," McCluskey mused. "And a lot of time. Especially if a burro and a load of equipment had to be buried too."

"You mean Pecos?"

"Maybe."

"You think *he's* dead too?"

"If he isn't guilty he's dead. Otherwise, wouldn't he have stayed at Brainard's home?"

"Holy smoke," muttered the sheriff. "I never thought of that. You know, if I wanted to get rid of a body and that much stuff, I'd dump them down one of the abandoned mining shafts around here."

"That's an angle. Better have your men work on it."

"Sure," the sheriff said queerly. "Got any more ideas? If Pecos turns up dead, who'll be chief suspect then? Juan, Courtney," the sheriff cleared his throat, "me?"

McCluskey's face widened in a brief grin. "Better find Pecos first."

The sheriff's nod was almost curt. He put his car in gear and pulled away. McCluskey shook his head and pushed through the gate into his garden. His head ached and his mind felt washed out. Just like the old days — suspects, motives, alibis — all ending at a blank wall. Only it wasn't a blank wall; McCluskey knew that. Somewhere in the wall was an opening, a secret door, or maybe only a narrow crack, but big enough to let a killer through — and big enough to follow him through, if a man's brain would only work. Good Lord, only this morning he had laughed to think of the boys in Homicide back in New York.

He walked tiredly through his garden.

But after he had showered, put on clean clothes, and was sitting on his verandah with the orange juice in his hand and the sun going down like a red, flattened cannonball behind the saw-toothed mountains, he felt better. The vagrant breeze drifted an aroma of fried chicken out of Maria's kitchen and McCluskey's stomach awoke with a rumble.

"Come and get it," Maria called, and Jefferson McCluskey went to get it.

Half an hour later he swallowed the last spoonful of ice cream, leaned back, let his belt out two notches, and felt he was his own man again.

For twenty minutes Maria had been detailing the gambling losses of

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one Señor Benavente who in some mysterious way was able to lose incredible sums at cockfighting, although he never worked.

"Maria," McCluskey interrupted, "I have a bit of news that might interest you."

Maria's monologue halted in midstride with her toothless mouth wide open.

"*Como?*"

McCluskey said, "Sally Devlin was married to Courtney Brainard last night."

From the corner of his eye McCluskey could see he had scored. Maria's bright, shoebutton eyes blinked twice. She started to speak, changed her mind, and abruptly marched into the kitchen. McCluskey mentally shook hands with himself. Maria didn't know all the news in Piñon. When she came back he gave her the other barrel.

"I also know what Sally Devlin's father said to her when she stayed out all night. He didn't say anything because he was asleep."

This time Maria's reply was prompt and scornful. "He was not asleep."

"How do you know?"

The mask dropped over Maria's face, and her eyes were pleased again.

"Then what did he say to Sally?" demanded McCluskey.

Maria shrugged, picked up dishes.

"Listen," cajoled McCluskey. "I'll trade you. I'll tell you where Sally was married if you'll tell me what her father said to her."

Maria looked at the untasted cup of coffee which was the only dish left on the table. "You want the coffee?"

"Yes . . . no." McCluskey ran a hand through his hair. "What did he say?"

Except for the shining eyes, Maria's face was stolid as a post. She picked up the coffee and went into the kitchen.

Jefferson McCluskey didn't sleep well that night. His mind kept returning to the problem of Sam Brainard's death until he finally gave up, went into the living room, and lit his pipe. Then he went outside and stood smoking in the garden, looking at the full moonlight illuminating the mountains twenty miles away in the clear air. The air was caressing, not warm but dry, smelling faintly of sage and greasewood, and carrying the distant night sounds from town. A coyote yapped and a dog barked back. A rooster crowed. Sometimes they crowed all night when the moon was full.

When he went back inside he felt better. He sat down and methodically began to review the facts. He began to shape them into tentative patterns. Forty minutes later he sat up straight in his chair.

Of course. Of course! He must have been blind. Then the triumph died in his eyes. He knew now, and he knew why. A grim business, being a policeman. He knocked out his cold pipe and put it in the rack.

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In bed he went over it once more and it was right. Well, if that was the way it was, then that was the way it had to be. Tomorrow would be an unpleasant day.

Next morning a curiously contrite Maria gave him the news.

"Pecos Thompson's body has been found. He was strangled to death." She served the orange juice. "His body was in the old Lone X mine shaft. There was also the body of his burro."

McCluskey drank his orange juice without comment.

"Courtney Brainard has been arrested," Maria added, sliding before McCluskey's nose an omelette that would have made a stone image smack its lips.

Pouring the coffee, Maria stated, "His wrist-watch was found in the mine shaft with the body. The sheriff arrested him half an hour ago."

McCluskey drank the coffee and looked at his watch. Eight thirty. He got his hat and left.

Maria stood pensively watching him go.

McCluskey parked his car in front of the county courthouse and went around to the basement entrance where Sheriff Pete Ford had his office. A uniformed deputy recognized McCluskey and opened the door for him. McCluskey paused before the open door, taken aback by the noises issuing from it.

Men were shouting, a woman was weeping, and from some farther recess came the clanking of bars.

The deputy grinned, shaking his head. "Quite a ruckus."

"Um," said McCluskey, walking inside.

Red-faced Sheriff Pete Ford saw him first and stopped jawing at equally red-faced Ben Devlin who finished a sentence: "— you know blamed well the boy's innocent. That Mexican did it!"

The Mexican, Juan Mendez, sat hunched in a corner, his dark eyes sullenly alert but unreadable. Sally Devlin sat crying on a bench, too sunk in her own woe to notice McCluskey's entrance.

Then Ben Devlin turned and saw McCluskey and for a few seconds there was silence except for Sally's quiet tears and the clanking of bars accompanied by Courtney Brainard's muffled, "Let me talk to Sally."

"Good morning," McCluskey said drily. "I see all the interested parties are present."

"Yeah," the sheriff said, "we found —"

"I know." McCluskey's upheld hand cut off the sheriff. "You found Pecos Thompson's body in a mine shaft. Strangled. Courtney Brainard's smashed wrist-watch was with it. What time did the watch say?"

"I'm glad there's something you don't know," muttered the sheriff. "It was busted at six thirty."

McCluskey nodded. "That gives everybody an alibi but Courtney, doesn't it?"

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"Yeah. He admits it's his watch, claims he wasn't wearing it the day of the murder."

McCluskey turned to the sheriff. "How far was the mining shaft from town?"

"About two hours hike up Parched Creek. Courtney could have got back to the Devlin house by eight o'clock if he hurried."

"Listen," Ben Devlin interrupted, "that Mexican did it. Sam gave him a licking and he killed Sam for revenge and Pecos because he was a witness. He hid Pecos's body so it'd look like Pecos killed Sam and lit out."

"I thought you didn't like Courtney Brainard," McCluskey said to Devlin.

"Maybe I still don't. But he's Sally's husband now. Besides, he didn't do it and I want to see him get a square deal."

"You're right about one thing," McCluskey told him. "Courtney didn't kill either of them."

"Nuts," grunted Sheriff Ford. "We got him dead to rights. Motive: to stop his uncle making a new will. Opportunity: from four o'clock to seven when he can't account for his movements. Evidence: his own watch. What more do you want?"

"Does Courtney admit his guilt?"

"Certainly not, but all the evidence points to him."

"That's beside the question," McCluskey said impatiently.

"Then what is the question?"

"The question is," McCluskey told him quietly, "*why did Pecos Thompson go to see Sam Brainard at all?*"

A sudden silence greeted McCluskey's question.

"All right," the sheriff said. "Why?"

"*Because the thing that stood between Sam and Pecos no longer existed.*"

"What do you mean?"

"The only reason Pecos would have gone to make up the feud with Sam would be that he, too, had at last struck it rich."

"That's crazy. If Pecos had struck it rich he would have —" The sheriff cut off the sentence in the middle, his eyes shifting away from McCluskey's.

"Exactly." McCluskey hated what he was saying. "He would have recorded the claim with Ben Devlin at the county courthouse."

All eyes swung to Ben Devlin. His wide Irish face looked surprised. "But I told you Pecos only stopped by to say he hadn't hit anything." Devlin spread his hands. "Besides, if Pecos had struck anything this trip, I'd be a rich man myself. I grubstaked him."

"I don't think so. He got his annuity check for a hundred dollars on October first. He wouldn't have needed a grubstake. Actually, he filed his claim with you day before yesterday and then left, saying he was headed for Sam Brainard's. Two hours later, after closing your office, you sneaked up the river bed to Sam's place where you found him and Pecos alone, very drunk and virtually helpless.

"Until then you may not have

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planned a murder, but there was the opportunity ready made for you and you couldn't resist it. You knew it was Juan's day off. Courtney was away. So you killed Sam with Pecos's pick, strangled Pecos, loaded his body on his own burro, and led the animal just far enough out into the desert so it would not be likely to be found during the next four hours. You had to hurry home for supper so as not to arouse any suspicions."

"That's insane," Devlin protested vehemently. "Pecos and Sam were my friends. That Mexican killed them!"

"No," contradicted McCluskey. "Juan just happened to catch your eye when you passed him in the river bed. You saw he was drunk and passed out. On the way back you slugged him a few times to make it appear he had been in a fight. You were planting clues right and left to divert suspicion in case Pecos's body was ever found. That's why you took Courtney's watch from his room, set it for six thirty, smashed it, broke the strap, and threw it into the shaft with the body."

"Sheriff!" Devlin jumped to his feet, staggering a little from his lame knee. "This guy's loco. You know me. I wouldn't do a thing like that."

"All right, Ben," the sheriff said evenly. "Just let him finish and we'll talk it over."

Ben Devlin subsided, his normally red face whitened around the mouth.

"That night," McCluskey continued inexorably, "after Sally and Courtney went out, you returned to where you had tied the burro, and led him to the abandoned mine shaft where you killed him and threw his and Pecos's bodies into the shaft, along with Courtney's watch. Up to that point your luck was perfect. Then it broke. You stumbled or fell somewhere on the trip and wrenched your knee; and from that moment your plan never had a chance. The injured knee slowed you down so badly it was after daylight before you hobbled home. You didn't know Sally had been out all night because you got home after she did. She thought you were asleep behind your closed door when she got home, so she went to bed and was herself asleep when you got home."

"Lies. Lies!" shouted Devlin. "Why are you trying to frame me?"

"Look, Jeff," the sheriff said. "That's all theory. We need proof."

"Search Devlin," McCluskey said. "And if the location of Pecos's mine isn't on him, search his house."

Ben Devlin suddenly whirled, took a step toward the door, stumbled as his lame knee failed him, and fell in front of the door. He started to rise but didn't. He sat for perhaps five seconds while the sheriff moved swiftly between him and the door.

"Get up, Ben," the sheriff said.

Ben Devlin drew a shuddering breath. "I must have been crazy," he said. "I must have been crazy."

Later Jefferson McCluskey and Sheriff Pete Ford stood outside on

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the skimpy courthouse lawn. "What made you suspect Ben at all?" the sheriff asked. "The business of Pecos's annuity?"

"Partly," McCluskey told him. "Although I didn't realize the implications of that fact until later. Anyhow, that wasn't conclusive because Pecos might have used that money for something besides a grubstake. I merely gambled on it. I really tumbled to Ben when I found out he wasn't asleep when Sally came home."

"I don't get it."

"Assuming he was awake — and he was — he would have raised cain with Sally for staying out so late — *if he had been home himself*. After I realized that, all the other things fell into place."

"All right. But suppose Ben had been smart enough to hide the claim's location instead of carrying it in his wallet. What proof would you have had then?"

"Well," McCluskey said reflectively, "someone in Piñon saw Devlin limp into town at dawn. It would have been a lot of trouble but, by heaven, I would have made her talk even if I had to build a slow fire under her feet."

"Her feet? Whose feet?"

McCluskey shook his head. "If I told you that, you'd know as much about what goes on in this town as I do."

Wearily McCluskey dragged through his garden and slumped into a chair on the verandah. It wasn't noon yet but he was tired.

"Orange juice?" Maria stood at his elbow holding a pitcher and glass.

McCluskey drank deeply and felt better. Maria refilled his glass, set the pitcher on the table, and turned to go.

"Maria." McCluskey smiled a little as the alert brown old poker-face turned toward him. "I've got some fresh news for you, Maria."

Her eyes glittered and McCluskey had a sudden premonition. "Don't tell me you already know?"

"Very sorry for Sally Devlin," Maria said. "But you were smart to catch her father."

"I quit," McCluskey groaned. "This is the end. No, wait, Maria. I want to ask you one question. Only one. So help me, if you'll answer it, I'll never ask another as long as I live."

He took a deep breath.

"The other morning when you told me Sally Devlin had been out all night, did you also know her father had killed Sam Brainard and Pecos Thompson?"

For a moment McCluskey thought she was going to speak. Then her leathery face crinkled about the eyes and the corners of her mouth pulled up in a smile.

Abruptly she turned and re-entered the house, and for some time McCluskey could hear her in the kitchen fixing his lunch — and laughing to herself.

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Leaves from the Editors' Notebook

The original version of QUEEN'S QUORUM *was included, as a long afterpiece, in* TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES, *an anthology edited by Ellery Queen, and published last year by The World Publishing Company as one of their series called "The Living Library" — the entire series under the editorial supervision of one of America's most distinguished men of letters, Carl Van Doren. The anthology contained fourteen modern detective stories never before published in book form in the United States — including "unknown" tales about G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown, Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op, T. S. Stribling's Professor Poggioli, and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple.*

QUEEN'S QUORUM *traced the history of the detective-crime-mystery short story from the Bible through the year 1947, offering a readers' and collectors' guide to the most important books published in this field since the very dawn of detection. Since the* QUORUM *is much too long to reprint at one time, especially in its present revised form, we are bringing it to you in short installments, beginning this issue, and with each installment we offer you a representative story of the period discussed.*

So, dear reader, happy reading — and if you should be bitten by the bibliophilic bug and have the irresistible impulse to add some of the great cornerstones to your library, happy hunting!

QUEEN'S QUORUM: *Part One*

by ELLERY QUEEN

I. The Incunabular Period

THE detective-crime-and-mystery story, like so many other forms of literature, had its genesis in the Bible. The first recorded murder was complete with victim, criminal, motive, and weapon; we know that "Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." But this was murder without mystery, and without mystery there was no need for a detective. However, if murder comes, can the detective be far behind? No — justice too can be the mother of invention.

Original version of "Queen's Quorum" from TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES, *edited by Ellery Queen. Copyright, 1948, by The World Publishing Co.*

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The first detective (although he was not called that, since the word did not come into usage until the Nineteenth Century) made his debut in the Apocryphal Scriptures. In *The History of Bel* Daniel solves a mystery by strewing ashes throughout a sealed temple, pinning the guilt on the first multiple culprit — three-score-and-ten priests of Bel. Antique as they may seem today, Daniel's methods are as authentic as those based on the latest scientific discoveries and now employed by the F.B.I. In *The History of Susanna* Daniel becomes the prototype of our modern legal sleuth: by clever cross-examination he convicts two elders of false testimony and rescues an innocent heroine from death. Thus another tradition was born — and "from that day forth was Daniel held in great reputation in the sight of the people."

The course of incunabular detection, having originated in ancient Hebrew literature, can next be traced through ancient Greek and Latin. In *The Treasure House of King Rhampsinitus*, a short story in Book II of Herodotus, the plot emphasis is laid on the cunning of the thief, but in this primitive duel between law and lawlessness the King himself, though unsuccessful, advances the detectival cause.* Some of the tales in Cicero's DE DIVINATIONE are embryonic detective stories, and in Book VIII of Vergil's THE AENEID that godlike hero of the ancients, Hercules, performs some rough-diamond detection in seeing through literature's first example of forged footprints.

The detective-crime story, however, was still a delicate plant: it sprouted feebly — but it did not die. In medieval literature we pick up the thread in tales from the GESTA ROMANORUM, first translated into English in the Fifteenth Century; in selections from Juan Manuel's EL CONDE LUCANOR, about the wisdom of Don Patronio; in Boccaccio's DECAMERON and in Muin-al-din Juvaini's Persian classic, NIGARISTAN; in Chaucer's CANTERBURY TALES, especially *The Pardoner's Tale;* and in some of Thomas Murner's ADVENTURES OF TYLL OWLGLASS.

The Elizabethan period had other and bigger fish to fry: it contributed little to the growth of pure detection. But in the Eighteenth Century literary detection changed its voice, emerging from criminological childhood into analytical adolescence. The first strong hint of puberty can be found in the pages of A THOUSAND NIGHTS AND A NIGHT, better known in English as ARABIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS, first published in French as early as 1704 and in English three years later. The mighty blow, paving the way for modern ratiocination, was struck by Voltaire in Chap. III of his

* More than two thousand years later Theodore Dreiser used the same basic plot, richly expanded, in his short story, *The Prince Who Was a Thief.* Dreiser acknowledged the source by subtitling the story: An Improvisation on the Oldest Oriental Theme. The tale is in Dreiser's book called CHAINS (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1927).

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ZADIG; OR, THE BOOK OF FATE (Nancy: Leseure, 1748;* London: John Brindley, 1749). Rambling near his country house on the banks of the Euphrates, the philosopher Zadig becomes involved in the search for the Queen's missing dog and the King's missing horse. Through a series of deductions as epigrammatic and astonishing as any ever tossed off by Sherlock Holmes, Zadig describes the lost animals and is arrested as the thief. Condemned to a whipping and imprisonment for life in Siberia, Zadig is saved when the King's "sacred" palfrey and the Queen's "illustrious" spaniel are found. Nevertheless, he is fined four hundred ounces of gold "for his false Declaration of his not having seen, what doubtless he did."

Allowed to appeal, Zadig pleads his own case, explaining his sharp and startling inferences. The "whole Bench of Judges stood astonish'd at the Profundity of Zadig's nice Discernment," and notwithstanding several of the King's and Queen's "Magi declar'd he ought to be burnt for a Sorceror; yet the King thought proper that the Fine he had deposited in Court, should be peremptorily restor'd."

The cause of detection, however, suffers an almost fatal setback. The Clerk of the Court, the Tipstaffs, and other petty Officers come to Zadig's house to refund the four hundred ounces of gold and "modestly" withhold three hundred and ninety "to defray the Fees of the Court." Naturally, Zadig is discouraged — "fully convinc'd, that it was very dangerous to be over-wise." He never thinks of setting up as a professional inquiry agent and charging for his services. Later, when a state prisoner has escaped, Zadig is consulted but refrains from giving information in his possession — for which he is promptly sentenced to pay five hundred ounces of gold. Zadig thanks the Judges for their "Indulgence" and abandons detective work — a colossal loss to the literature of detection. Nevertheless, Zadig is the true progenitor of Dupin, Holmes, *et al.*¶

II. The Founding Father

The detective story lagged for almost a century. In THE ATLANTIC SOUVENIR: A CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S OFFERING, 1828 (published late in 1827 by Carey, Lea & Carey, Philadelphia) appeared a short story titled

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* According to Bengesco, the true first edition of ZADIG was published in 1747 under the title MEMNON; HISTOIRE ORIENTALE. Jules Le Petit, however, designates the 1748 edition as the earliest.

¶For the finest collection of incunabula in a single volume see BEFORE SCOTLAND YARD: CLASSIC TALES OF ROGUERY AND DETECTION, edited by Peter Haworth (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927); published in America as CLASSIC CRIMES IN HISTORY AND FICTION (New York: D. Appleton, 1927).

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The Rifle, "by the Author of Leisure Hours at Sea." This tale illustrates perfectly the transitional period between Voltaire and Poe. A young doctor is accused of murdering an old hunter; the evidence is so conclusive that the doctor is found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. Another hunter, Jim Buckhorn, undertakes to clear the accused man "with an earnestness which nothing but a firm conviction of our hero's innocence, superadded to his love for Judy, could possibly have enkindled" — note the popular-magazine approach: as early as 1827 the author made the solution to the puzzle merely a means to resolving a love conflict. Jim Buckhorn turns "the tables before hanging day" by breaking the alibi of the true murderer and proving his guilt by a cogent, if now primitive, deduction in ballistics.

The character-names in the story are a pre-Dickensian delight: Dr. Charles Rivington, the accused; Mr. Silversight, the victim; squire Lawton, the magistrate; Lawyer Blandly, "who was counsel for our hero"; Mr. Drill, the gunsmith; and Caleb Rumley, the deputy-sheriff who (shadows of the things to be!) proves to be "the real perpetrator of the crime."

The Rifle is also included in TALES AND SKETCHES BY A COUNTRY SCHOOLMASTER, published anonymously by J. & J. Harper, 1829, and research by two Chicagoans has identified the author as William Leggett.

In 1837 appeared Nathaniel Hawthorne's TWICE-TOLD TALES (Boston: John B. Russell), containing some mystery and riddle stories, the best of which is *Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe.* Vincent Starrett has said of this tale that "it comes close to being a detective story in the purest sense." For a contemporary criticism let us call to the stand no less an authority than the Founding Father himself — Edgar Allan Poe — who wrote: "*Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe* is vividly original and managed most dexterously" — high praise indeed from the greatest of masters.

Which brings us to that red-letter day in April 1841 when the world's first detective story, in the full modern sense, appeared in "Graham's Magazine," Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A. — *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar A. Poe, introducing the world's first full-fledged detective, C. Auguste Dupin, to a then unimpressed planet. Poe's first detective story coalesced all that had gone before. Here was no trifling advance over the blunderings of the past, no mere pioneering or experimental effort. Here was the detective story, stepping boldly out of its eggshell, "fully grown and armed to the teeth," an acknowledged technical and artistic masterpiece. Indeed, Dorothy L. Sayers has expressed the opinion that Poe's first detective story "constitutes in itself almost a complete manual of detective theory and practice."

Within the next three years Poe wrote three more detective stories. Incredible as it may seem today, Poe's tales of ratiocination failed to excite

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contemporary writers. This is proved by the unbelievable fact that in the sixteen years following the first edition of Poe's TALES not a single book was published in the United States that contained a detective story! Like Voltaire a full century before, Poe became discouraged and retired from fictional ferreting. But he left his mark — an imperishable heritage which has become the Holy Grail for thousands of novitiates and millions of devotees.

Thus we come to the first important book of detective stories, the first and the greatest, the cornerstone of cornerstones in any readers' or collectors' guide, the highest of all highspots:

1. Edgar Allan Poe's
TALES
New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845

The 1845 edition contains for the first time in book form all three Dupin stories — *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, and *The Purloined Letter*. *The Gold-Bug* is also included, but not Poe's fourth detective story, *Thou Art the Man*, which first appeared in book form in Volume II of THE WORKS OF THE LATE EDGAR ALLAN POE (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1850), known as the Griswold edition. If, however, you want the true first edition in book form of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* alone, without the two other tales in the Dupin trilogy, you will have to purchase one of the greatest rarities of Poeana, only ten copies of which are known to exist — THE PROSE ROMANCES OF EDGAR A. POE, No. 1, the first and only number of a pamphlet series published by William H. Graham, Philadelphia, in 1843; this leaflet was issued to sell for twelve and one-half cents, but in fine condition it will now cost you $25,000. If this is too astronomical for your pocketbook, the next step down is the 1845 TALES which, according to condition, will carry a price tag of from $100 to $4000. It is believed that no more than 750 copies of the 1845 TALES were printed; considering how many must have been lost or destroyed, it is safe to assume there are barely 200 copies still extant of which only "five copies [of the first issue, first state] are known in original wrappers." * If the market price of the TALES is also too steep for you, then ask your favorite second-hand bookdealer to pick up a copy of the McClure, Phillips edition of 1904, titled MONSIEUR DUPIN; this excellent compilation contains all five stories mentioned above and will reduce your bank account by only a few dollars.

But if a bookseller ever offers you any copy of a Poe book with the author's signature on the flyleaf or half-title, with the name "Edgar Allan

* Quoted from ONE HUNDRED INFLUENTIAL AMERICAN BOOKS PRINTED BEFORE 1900 (New York: Grolier Club, 1947).

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Poe" spelled out in full, don't pay an extra nickel for the autograph. Poe letters sometimes command even higher prices than his first editions, but *caveat emptor:* in his signatures Poe never used anything but the initial A. for his middle name.

III. The First Fifty Years

While America and American writers ignored Poe's literary invention for nearly two decades, the seed of his noble experiment took firmer root in England, sprouted, and bore abundant fruit. Jolted by the appearance in 1850 of four police articles written by Charles Dickens, which were founded on the true experiences of Dickens's friends among plainclothes detectives, English writers heard the knock of Opportunity on their door. For nearly half a century (1850–1890), they spewed forth a flood of detective "reminiscences." Most of these so-called real-life "diaries" were thinly disguised fiction, written by anonymous and pseudonymous hacks. Immensely popular and literally read to death, these "revelations" vanished into limbo: less than sixty different titles are known today. The survivors include the work of Charles Martel (Thomas Delf), James M'Levy, Andrew Forrester, Jr., Alfred Hughes, William Henderson, and the most famous of his fading fraternity, Thomas Russell, who used the pseudonym "Waters" and related his exploits in first person. As a representative cornerstone of this "purple patch," we list the most important yellow-back of its time:

2. "Waters's"
RECOLLECTIONS OF A DETECTIVE POLICE-OFFICER *
London: J. & C. Brown, 1856

The true first edition was published in New York, 1852, by Cornish, Lamport, under the title THE RECOLLECTIONS OF A POLICEMAN, attributed to Thomas Waters; this edition was probably pirated, the text lifted from "Chambers's Edinburgh Journal" and "some of our American Magazines." In the Preface to the United States edition a contemporary commentator wrote: "The Detective Policeman is in some respects peculiar to England — one of the developments of the last twenty-five years. He differs as much from the informer and spy of the Continent of Europe, as the modern Protective Policeman does from the old fashioned Watchman. In point of fact,

* The second series (London: W. Kent, 1859) appeared in England under the same title. Five of the eight stories in the second series were published in the United States as a Dime Novel titled BIOGRAPHY OF A GREAT DETECTIVE, by Himself (New York: Frank Tousey, January 3, 1884).

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he is a preventive as much as a detective. His occupation is as honorable as it is dangerous. Its difficulties and danger give it an odor of the romantic. The record of 'hair-breadth 'scapes' which follow, is another verification of the old saying, 'Truth is stranger than fiction.' "

The next step in "Private-Eye's Progress" was taken by Wilkie Collins. His classic story, *The Biter Bit*, introduced comedy into the detective story — a development of first magnitude. According to the criminological custom of the day, the tale was "Extracted from the Correspondence of the London Police" — a series of letters which passed among Chief Inspector Theakstone, Sergeant Bulmer, and an upstart-novice, one Mr. Matthew Sharpin — and appeared in Volume Two of the triple-decker:

3. Wilkie Collins's
THE QUEEN OF HEARTS
London: Hurst and Blackett, 1859

In some ways the detective story had more claim to prestige a century ago than it has today. *The Biter Bit* was first published in the United States in a magazine — under the title *Who Is the Thief?* And what magazine do you think published this humorous detective story 'way back in April 1858? None other than "The Atlantic Monthly"! Ah, but the story, you say, bore the "big name" of Wilkie Collins — that's why "The Atlantic Monthly" printed it. No, it was still two years before THE WOMAN IN WHITE, ten years before THE MOONSTONE — in 1858 Wilkie Collins was virtually unknown in America. Moreover, the story appeared in the sacred pages of "The Atlantic Monthly" without any author's name at all.

On the heels of Wilkie Collins's ragout of robbery-and-romance came Charles Dickens's most important contribution to the detective short story — *Hunted Down*. While admittedly not one of Dickens's masterpieces, *Hunted Down* is a fascinating tale of realistic detection, still technically rewarding to all students of the genre. Inspired by the career of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, the infamous poisoner, the story transforms real life into "exquisite" Victorian melodrama. In book form

4. Charles Dickens's
HUNTED DOWN
Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1860
London: John Camden Hotten, 1870

has a complicated bibliographic history. First book publication in America preceded the London edition by nine years — it is included in THE LAMPLIGHTER'S STORY, T. B. Peterson, Philadelphia, 1861. *Hunted Down* is not usually considered one of Dickens's Christmas stories, but in a larger sense

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isn't every story of crime and punishment a Christmas parable? When a cruel and crafty murder is avenged, when justice triumphs, when good conquers evil, surely that is a step in the right direction — toward peace on earth, good will toward man. And no writer understood more deeply than Charles Dickens the meaning of good will toward man — even in his detective stories . . .

(*to be continued next month*)

THE BITER BIT

by WILKIE COLLINS

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE, OF THE DETECTIVE POLICE, TO SERGEANT BULMER OF THE SAME FORCE.

LONDON, *4th July*, 18—.

SERGEANT BULMER, — This is to inform you that you are wanted to assist in looking up a case of importance, which will require all the attention of an experienced member of the force. The matter of the robbery on which you are now engaged, you will please to shift over to the young man who brings you this letter. You will tell him all the circumstances of the case, just as they stand; you will put him up to the progress you have made (if any) towards detecting the person or persons by whom the money has been stolen; and you will leave him to make the best he can of the matter now in your hands. He is to have the whole responsibility of the case, and the whole credit of his success, if he is successful.

So much for the orders that I am desired to communicate to you.

A word in your ear, next, about this new man who is to take your place. His name is Matthew Sharpin; and he is to have the chance given him of dashing into our office at a jump — supposing he turns out strong enough to take it. You will naturally ask me how he comes by this privilege. I can only tell you that he has some uncommonly strong interest to back him in certain high quarters which you and I had better not mention except under our breaths. He has been a lawyer's clerk; and he is wonderfully conceited in his opinion of himself, as well as mean and underhand to look at. According to his own account he leaves his old trade, and joins ours of his own free will and preference. You will no more believe that than I do. My notion is that he has managed to ferret out some private information in connection with the affairs of one of his master's clients, which makes him rather an awkward customer to keep in the office for the future, and which, at the same time, gives him hold enough over his employer to make it dangerous to drive him into a corner

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by turning him away. I think the giving him this unheard-of chance among us is, in plain words, pretty much like giving him hush-money to keep him quiet. However that may be, Mr. Matthew Sharpin is to have the case now in your hands; and if he succeeds with it, he pokes his ugly nose into our office, as sure as fate. I put you up to this, Sergeant, so that you may not stand in your own light by giving the new man any cause to complain of you at headquarters, and remain yours,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

FROM MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN
TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE

LONDON, 5*th July*, 18—.

DEAR SIR, — Having now been favored with the necessary instructions from Sergeant Bulmer, I beg to remind you of certain directions which I have received, relating to the report of my future proceedings which I am to prepare for examination at headquarters.

The object of my writing, and of your examining what I have written, before you send it in to the higher authorities, is, I am informed, to give me, as an untried hand, the benefit of your advice, in case I want it (which I venture to think I shall not) at any stage of my proceedings. As the extraordinary circumstances of the case on which I am now engaged make it impossible for me to absent myself from the place where the robbery was committed, until I have made some progress towards discovering the thief, I am necessarily precluded from consulting you personally. Hence the necessity of my writing down the various details, which might, perhaps, be better communicated by word of mouth. This, if I am not mistaken, is the position in which we are now placed. I state my own impressions on the subject, in writing, in order that we may clearly understand each other at the outset; and have the honor to remain, your obedient servant,

MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE
TO MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN

LONDON, 5*th July*, 18—.

SIR, — You have begun by wasting time, ink, and paper. We both of us perfectly well knew the position we stood in towards each other, when I sent you with my letter to Sergeant Bulmer. There was not the least need to repeat it in writing. Be so good as to employ your pen, in future, on the business actually in hand.

You have now three separate matters on which to write to me. First, you have to draw up a statement of your instructions received from Sergeant Bulmer, in order to show us that nothing has escaped your memory, and that you are thoroughly acquainted with all the circumstances of the case which has been entrusted to you. Secondly, you are to inform me what it is you propose to do. Thirdly, you are to report every inch of your progress (if you make any) from day to day, and, if need be,

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from hour to hour as well. This is *your* duty. As to what *my* duty may be, when I want you to remind me of it, I will write and tell you so. In the meantime, I remain, yours,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

FROM MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE

LONDON, *6th July*, 18—.

SIR, — You are rather an elderly person and, as such, naturally inclined to be a little jealous of men like me, who are in the prime of their lives and their faculties. Under these circumstances, it is my duty to be considerate towards you, and not to bear too hardly on your small failings. I decline, therefore, altogether, to take offense at the tone of your letter; I give you the full benefit of the natural generosity of my nature; I sponge the very existence of your surly communication out of my memory — in short, Chief Inspector Theakstone, I forgive you, and proceed to business.

My first duty is to draw up a full statement of the instructions I have received from Sergeant Bulmer. Here they are at your service, according to my version of them:

At number 13 Rutherford Street, Soho, there is a stationer's shop. It is kept by one Mr. Yatman. He is a married man, but has no family. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Yatman, the other inmates in the house are a young single man named Jay, who lodges in the front room on the second floor — a shopman, who sleeps in one of the attics — and a servant-of-all-work, whose bed is in the back-kitchen. Once a week a charwoman comes for a few hours in the morning only, to help this servant. These are all the persons who, on ordinary occasions, have means of access to the interior of the house.

Mr. Yatman has been in business for many years, carrying on his affairs prosperously enough to realize a handsome independence for a person in his position. Unfortunately for himself he endeavored to increase the amount of his property by speculating. He ventured boldly in his investments, luck went against him, and rather less than two years ago he found himself a poor man again. All that was saved out of the wreck of his property was the sum of two hundred pounds.

Although Mr. Yatman did his best to meet his altered circumstances, by giving up many of the luxuries and comforts to which he and his wife had been accustomed, he found it impossible to retrench so far as to allow him to put by any money from the income produced by the shop. The business has been declining of late years — the cheap advertising stationers having done it injury with the public. Consequently, up to the last week the only surplus property possessed by Mr. Yatman consisted of the two hundred pounds which had been recovered from the wreck of his fortune. This sum was placed as a deposit in a joint-stock bank of the highest possible character.

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Eight days ago Mr. Yatman and his lodger, Mr. Jay, held a conversation on the subject of the commercial difficulties which are hampering trade in all directions at the present time. Mr. Jay (who lives by supplying the newspapers with short paragraphs relating to incidents, offenses, and brief records of remarkable occurrences in general — who is, in short, what they call a penny-a-liner) told his landlord that he had been in the city that day, and had heard unfavorable rumors on the subject of the joint-stock banks. The rumors to which he alluded had already reached the ears of Mr. Yatman from other quarters; and the confirmation of them by his lodger had such an effect on his mind — predisposed as it was to alarm by the experience of his former losses — that he resolved to go at once to the bank and withdraw his deposit.

It was then getting on towards the end of the afternoon; and he arrived just in time to receive his money before the bank closed.

He received the deposit in banknotes of the following amounts: one fifty-pound note, three twenty-pound notes, six ten-pound notes, and six five-pound notes.

He brought the money back in an envelope placed in his breast-pocket; and asked his shopman, on getting home, to look for a small flat tin cash-box, which had not been used for years, and which, as Mr. Yatman remembered it, was exactly the right size to hold the banknotes. For some time the cash-box was searched for in vain. Mr. Yatman called to his wife to know if she had any idea where it was. The question was overheard by the servant-of-all-work, who was taking up the tea-tray at the time, and by Mr. Jay, who was coming downstairs on his way out to the theatre. Ultimately the cash-box was found by the shopman. Mr. Yatman placed the banknotes in it, secured them by a padlock, and put the box in his coat-pocket. It stuck out of the coat-pocket very little, but enough to be seen. Mr. Yatman remained at home, upstairs, all the evening. No visitors called. At eleven o'clock he went to bed, and put the cash-box along with his clothes, on a chair by the bedside.

When he and his wife woke the next morning, the box was gone. Payment of the notes was immediately stopped at the Bank of England; but no news of the money has been heard of since that time.

So far, the circumstances of the case are perfectly clear. They point unmistakably to the conclusion that the robbery must have been committed by some person living in the house. Suspicion falls, therefore, upon the servant-of-all-work, upon the shopman, and upon Mr. Jay. The first two knew that the cash-box was being inquired for by their master, but did not know what it was he wanted to put into it. They would assume, of course, that it was money. They both had opportunities (the servant, when she took away the

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tea — and the shopman, when he came, after shutting up, to give the keys of the till to his master) of seeing the cash-box in Mr. Yatman's pocket, and of inferring naturally, from its position there, that he intended to take it into his bedroom with him at night.

Mr. Jay, on the other hand, had been told, during the afternoon's conversation on the subject of joint-stock banks, that his landlord had a deposit of two hundred pounds in one of them. He also knew that Mr. Yatman left him with the intention of drawing that money out; and he heard the inquiry for the cash-box, afterwards, when he was coming downstairs. He must, therefore, have inferred that the money was in the house, and that the cash-box was the receptacle intended to contain it. That he could have had any idea, however, of the place in which Mr. Yatman intended to keep it for the night is impossible, seeing that he went out before the box was found, and did not return till his landlord was in bed. Consequently, if he committed the robbery, he must have gone into the bedroom purely on speculation.

Speaking of the bedroom reminds me of the necessity of noticing the situation of it in the house, and the means that exist of gaining easy access to it at any hour of the night.

The room in question is the back-room on the first floor. In consequence of Mrs. Yatman's constitutional nervousness on the subject of fire (which makes her apprehend being burned alive in her room, in case of accident, by the hampering of the lock if the key is turned in it) her husband has never been accustomed to lock the bedroom door. Both he and his wife are, by their own admission, heavy sleepers. Consequently, the risk to be run by any evil-disposed persons wishing to plunder the bedroom was of the most trifling kind. They could enter the room by merely turning the handle of the door; and if they moved with ordinary caution, there was no fear of their waking the sleepers inside. This fact is of importance. It strengthens our conviction that the money must have been taken by one of the inmates of the house.

Such are the circumstances, as they were related to Sergeant Bulmer, when he was first called in to discover the guilty parties and, if possible, to recover the lost banknotes. The strictest inquiry which he could institute failed to produce the smallest fragment of evidence against any of the persons on whom suspicion naturally fell. Their language and behavior, on being informed of the robbery, were perfectly consistent with the language and behavior of innocent people. Sergeant Bulmer felt from the first that this was a case for private inquiry and secret observation. He began by recommending Mr. and Mrs. Yatman to affect a feeling of perfect confidence in the innocence of the persons living under their roof; and he then opened the campaign by employing himself

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in following the goings and comings, and in discovering the friends, the habits, and the secrets of the maid-of-all-work.

Three days and nights of exertions on his own part, and on that of others who were competent to assist his investigations, were enough to satisfy him that there was no sound cause for suspicion against the girl.

He next practised the same precaution in relation to the shopman. There was more difficulty and uncertainty in privately clearing up this person's character without his knowledge, but the obstacles were at last smoothed away with tolerable success; and though there is not the same amount of certainty in this case which there was in that of the girl, there is still fair reason for supposing that the shopman has had nothing to do with the robbery of the cash-box.

As a necessary consequence of these proceedings the range of suspicion now becomes limited to the lodger, Mr. Jay.

When I presented your letter of introduction to Sergeant Bulmer, he had already made some inquiries on the subject of this young man. The result, so far, has not been at all favorable. Mr. Jay's habits are irregular; he frequents public-houses, and seems to be familiarly acquainted with a great many dissolute characters; he is in debt to most of the tradespeople whom he employs; he has not paid his rent to Mr. Yatman for the last month; yesterday evening he came home excited by liquor, and last week he was seen talking to a prizefighter. In short, though Mr. Jay does call himself a journalist, by virtue of his penny-a-line contributions to the newspapers, he is a young man of low tastes, vulgar manners, and bad habits.

I have now reported, down to the very last details, all the particulars communicated to me by Sergeant Bulmer. I believe you will not find an omission anywhere; and I think you will admit, though you are prejudiced against me, that a clearer statement of facts was never laid before you than the statement I have now made. My next duty is to tell you what I propose to do now.

In the first place, it is clearly my business to take up the case at the point where Sergeant Bulmer has left it. On his authority, I am justified in assuming that I have no need to trouble myself about the maid-of-all-work and the shopman. Their characters are now to be considered as cleared up. What remains to be privately investigated is the question of the guilt or innocence of Mr. Jay.

This is the plan that I have adopted, with the full approval of Mr. and Mrs. Yatman.

I propose, today, to present myself at the house in the character of a young man who is looking for lodgings. The back-room on the second floor will be shown to me as the room to let; and I shall establish myself there tonight, as a person from the country who has come to

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London to look for a situation in a respectable shop or office.

By this means I shall be living next to the room occupied by Mr. Jay. The partition between us is mere lath and plaster. I shall make a small hole in it, near the cornice, through which I can see what Mr. Jay does in his room, and hear every word that is said when any friend happens to call on him. Whenever he is at home, I shall be at my post of observation. Whenever he goes out, I shall be after him. By employing these means of watching him I believe I may look forward to the discovery of his secret — if he knows anything about the lost banknotes — as to a dead certainty.

What you may think of my plan of observation I cannot undertake to say. It appears to me to unite the invaluable merits of boldness and simplicity. Fortified by this conviction, I close the present communication with feelings of the most sanguine description in regard to the future, and remain your obedient servant,

MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME

7th July.

SIR, — As you have not honored me with any answer to my last communication, I assume that, in spite of your prejudices against me, it has produced the favorable impression on your mind which I ventured to anticipate. Gratified beyond measure by the token of approval which your eloquent silence conveys to me, I proceed to report the progress that has been made in the course of the last twenty-four hours.

I am now comfortably established next door to Mr. Jay; and I am delighted to say that I have two holes in the partition, instead of one. My natural sense of humor has led me into the pardonable extravagance of giving them appropriate names. One I call my Peep-hole, and the other my Pipe-hole. The name of the first explains itself; the name of the second refers to a small tin pipe, or tube, inserted in the hole, and twisted so that the mouth of it comes close to my ear, while I am standing at my post of observation. Thus, while I am looking at Mr. Jay through my Peep-hole, I can hear every word that may be spoken in his room through my Pipe-hole.

Perfect candor — a virtue which I have possessed from my childhood — compels me to acknowledge, before I go any further, that the ingenious notion of adding a Pipe-hole to my proposed Peep-hole originated with Mrs. Yatman. This lady — a most intelligent and accomplished person, simple, and yet distinguished, in her manners — has entered into all my little plans with an enthusiasm and intelligence which I cannot too highly praise. Mr. Yatman is so cast down by his loss that he is quite incapable of affording me any assistance. Mrs. Yatman, who is evidently most tenderly attached to him, feels her husband's sad condition of mind even more acutely than she feels the

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loss of the money; and is mainly stimulated to exertion by her desire to assist in raising him from the miserable state of prostration into which he has now fallen.

"The money, Mr. Sharpin," she said to me yesterday evening, with tears in her eyes, "the money may be regained by rigid economy and strict attention to business. It is my husband's wretched state of mind that makes me so anxious for the discovery of the thief. I may be wrong, but I felt hopeful of success as soon as you entered the house; and I believe, if the wretch who has robbed us is to be found, you are the man to discover him." I accepted this gratifying compliment in the spirit in which it was offered — firmly believing that I shall be found, sooner or later, to have thoroughly deserved it.

Let me now return to business.

I have enjoyed some hours of calm observation of Mr. Jay. Though rarely at home, as I understand from Mrs. Yatman, on ordinary occasions, he has been in-doors the whole of this day. That is suspicious, to begin with. I have to report, further, that he rose at a late hour this morning (always a bad sign in a young man), and that he lost a great deal of time, after he was up, in yawning and complaining to himself of headache. Like other debauched characters, he ate little or nothing for breakfast. His next proceeding was to smoke a pipe — a dirty clay pipe, which a gentleman would have been ashamed to put between his lips. When he had done smoking, he took out pen, ink, and paper, and sat down to write with a groan — whether of remorse for having taken the banknotes, or of disgust at the task before him, I am unable to say. After writing a few lines (too far away from my Peep-hole to give me a chance of reading over his shoulder), he leaned back in his chair, and amused himself by humming the tunes of certain popular songs. Whether these do, or do not, represent secret signals by which he communicates with his accomplices remains to be seen. After he had amused himself for some time by humming, he got up and began to walk about the room, occasionally stopping to add a sentence to the paper on his desk. Before long, he went to a locked cupboard and opened it. I strained my eyes eagerly, in expectation of making a discovery. I saw him take something carefully out of the cupboard — he turned round — and it was only a pint bottle of brandy! Having drunk some of the liquor, this extremely indolent reprobate lay down on his bed again, and in five minutes was fast asleep.

After hearing him snoring for at least two hours, I was recalled to my Peep-hole by a knock at his door. He jumped up and opened it with suspicious activity.

A very small boy, with a very dirty face, walked in, said, "Please, sir, they're waiting for you," sat down on a chair, with his legs a long way from the ground, and instantly fell asleep! Mr. Jay swore an oath, tied a

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wet towel round his head, and going back to his paper, began to cover it with writing as fast as his fingers could move the pen. Occasionally getting up to dip the towel in water and tie it on again, he continued at this employment for nearly three hours; then folded up the leaves of writing, woke the boy, and gave them to him, with this remarkable expression: "Now, then, young sleepy-head, quick — march! If you see the governor, tell him to have the money ready when I call for it." The boy grinned, and disappeared. I was sorely tempted to follow "sleepy-head," but, on reflection, considered it safest still to keep my eye on the proceedings of Mr. Jay.

In half an hour's time he put on his hat and walked out. Of course, I put on my hat and walked out also. As I went downstairs, I passed Mrs. Yatman going up. The lady has been kind enough to undertake, by previous arrangement between us, to search Mr. Jay's room, while he is out of the way, and while I am necessarily engaged in the pleasing duty of following him wherever he goes. On the occasion to which I now refer, he walked straight to the nearest tavern, and ordered a couple of mutton chops for his dinner. I placed myself in the next box to him, and ordered a couple of mutton chops for my dinner. Before I had been in the room a minute, a young man of highly suspicious manners and appearance, sitting at a table opposite, took his glass of porter and joined Mr. Jay.

"Jack has been here inquiring after you," says the young man.

"Did he leave any message?" asks Mr. Jay.

"Yes," says the other. "He told me, if I met you, to say that he wished very particularly to see you tonight, and that he would give you a look in, at Rutherford Street, at seven o'clock."

"All right," says Mr. Jay. "I'll get back in time to see him."

Upon this, the suspicious-looking young man finished his porter, and saying that he was rather in a hurry, took leave of his friend (perhaps I should not be wrong if I said his accomplice) and left the room.

At twenty-five minutes and a half past six — in these serious cases it is important to be particular about time — Mr. Jay finished his chops and paid his bill. At twenty-six minutes and three-quarters I finished my chops and paid mine. In ten minutes more I was inside the house in Rutherford Street, and was received by Mrs. Yatman in the passage. That charming woman's face exhibited an expression of melancholy and disappointment which it quite grieved me to see.

"I am afraid, Ma'am," says I, "that you have not hit on any little criminating discovery in the lodger's room?"

She shook her head and sighed. It was a soft, languid, fluttering sigh — and, upon my life, it quite upset me.

"Don't despair, Ma'am," I said, with an insinuating mildness which seemed to touch her. "I have heard a

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mysterious conversation — I know of a guilty appointment — and I expect great things from my Peep-hole and my Pipe-hole tonight. Pray, don't be alarmed, but I think we are on the brink of a discovery."

Here my enthusiastic devotion to business got the better of my tender feelings. I looked — winked — nodded — left her.

When I got back to my observatory, I found Mr. Jay digesting his mutton chops in an armchair, with his pipe in his mouth. On his table were two tumblers, a jug of water, and the pint bottle of brandy. It was then close upon seven o'clock. As the hour struck, the person described as "Jack" walked in.

He looked agitated — I am happy to say he looked violently agitated. The cheerful glow of anticipated success diffused itself (to use a strong expression) all over me, from head to foot. With breathless interest I looked through my Peep-hole, and saw the visitor — the "Jack" of this delightful case — sit down, facing me, at the opposite side of the table to Mr. Jay. Making allowance for the difference in expression which their countenances just now happened to exhibit, these two abandoned villains were so much alike in other respects as to lead at once to the conclusion that they were brothers. Jack was the cleaner man and the better dressed of the two. I admit that, at the outset. It is, perhaps, one of my failings to push justice and impartiality to their utmost limits. I am no Pharisee; and where Vice has its redeeming point, I say, let Vice have its due — yes, yes, by all manner of means, let Vice have its due.

"What's the matter now, Jack?" says Mr. Jay.

"Can't you see it in my face?" says Jack. "My dear fellow, delays are dangerous. Let us have done with suspense, and risk it the day after tomorrow."

"So soon as that?" cried Mr. Jay, looking very much astonished. "Well, I'm ready, if you are. But, I say, Jack, is Somebody Else ready too? Are you quite sure of that?"

He smiled as he spoke — a frightful smile — and laid a very strong emphasis on those two words, "Somebody Else." There is evidently a third ruffian, a nameless desperado, concerned in the business.

"Meet us tomorrow," says Jack, "and judge for yourself. Be in the Regent's Park at eleven in the morning."

"I'll be there," says Mr. Jay. "Have a drop of brandy and water? What are you getting up for? You're not going already?"

"Yes, I am," says Jack. "The fact is, I'm so excited and agitated that I can't sit still anywhere for five minutes together. Ridiculous as it may appear to you, I'm in a perpetual state of nervous flutter. I can't, for the life of me, help fearing that we shall be found out. I fancy that every man who looks twice at me in the street is a spy ——"

At those words I thought my legs

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would have given way under me. Nothing but strength of mind kept me at my Peep-hole — nothing else, I give you my word of honor.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Mr. Jay, with all the effrontery of a veteran in crime. "We have kept the secret up to this time, and we will manage cleverly to the end. Have a drop of brandy and water, and you will feel as certain about it as I do."

Jack steadily refused the brandy and water, and steadily persisted in taking his leave.

"I must try if I can't walk it off," he said. "Remember tomorrow morning — eleven o'clock, Avenue Road side of the Regent's Park."

With those words he went out. His hardened relative laughed desperately, and resumed the dirty clay pipe.

I sat down on the side of my bed, actually quivering with excitement.

It is clear to me that no attempt has yet been made to change the stolen banknotes; and I may add that Sergeant Bulmer was of that opinion also, when he left the case in my hands. What is the natural conclusion to draw from the conversation which I have just set down? Evidently, that the confederates meet tomorrow to take their respective shares in the stolen money, and to decide on the safest means of getting the notes changed the day after. Mr. Jay is, beyond a doubt, the leading criminal in this business, and he will probably run the chief risk — that of changing the fifty-pound note. I shall, therefore, still make it my business to follow him — attending at the Regent's Park tomorrow, and doing my best to hear what is said there. If another appointment is made the day after, I shall, of course, go to it. In the meantime, I shall want the immediate assistance of two competent persons (supposing the rascals separate after their meeting) to follow the two minor criminals. It is only fair to add that if the rogues all retire together, I shall probably keep my subordinates in reserve. Being naturally ambitious, I desire, if possible, to have the whole credit of discovering this robbery to myself.

8th July.

I have to acknowledge, with thanks, the speedy arrival of my two subordinates — men of very average abilities, I am afraid; but, fortunately, I shall always be there to direct them.

My first business this morning was, necessarily, to prevent mistakes by accounting to Mr. and Mrs. Yatman for the presence of two strangers on the scene. Mr. Yatman (between ourselves, a poor feeble man) only shook his head and groaned. Mrs. Yatman (that superior woman) favored me with a charming look of intelligence.

"Oh, Mr. Sharpin!" she said, "I am so sorry to see those two men! Your sending for their assistance looks as if you were beginning to be doubtful of success."

I privately winked at her (she is very good in allowing me to do so

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without taking offense), and told her, in my facetious way, that she labored under a slight mistake.

"It is because I am sure of success, Ma'am, that I send for them. I am determined to recover the money, not for my own sake only, but for Mr. Yatman's sake — and for yours."

I laid a considerable amount of stress on those last three words. She said, "Oh, Mr. Sharpin!" again — and blushed a heavenly red — and looked down at her work. I could go to the world's end with that woman, if Mr. Yatman would only die.

I sent off the two subordinates to wait, until I wanted them, at the Avenue Road gate of the Regent's Park. Half an hour afterwards I was following in the same direction myself, at the heels of Mr. Jay.

The two confederates were punctual to the appointed time, but the third rogue — the nameless desperado of my report, or if you prefer it, the mysterious "Somebody Else" of the conversation between the two brothers — is a Woman! And, what is worse, a young woman! And what is more lamentable still, a nice-looking woman! I have long resisted a growing conviction that, wherever there is mischief in this world, an individual of the fair sex is inevitably certain to be mixed up in it. After the experience of this morning I can struggle against that sad conclusion no longer. I give up the sex — excepting Mrs. Yatman, I give up the sex.

The man named "Jack" offered the woman his arm. Mr. Jay placed himself on the other side of her. The three then walked away slowly among the trees. I followed them at a respectful distance. My two subordinates, at a respectful distance also, followed me.

It was, I deeply regret to say, impossible to get near enough to them to overhear their conversation, without running too great a risk of being discovered. I could only infer from their gestures and actions that they were all three talking with extraordinary earnestness on some subject which deeply interested them. After having been engaged in this way a full quarter of an hour, they suddenly turned round to retrace their steps. My presence of mind did not forsake me in this emergency. I signed to the two subordinates to walk on carelessly and pass them, while I myself slipped dexterously behind a tree. As they came by me, I heard "Jack" address these words to Mr. Jay:

"Let us say half-past ten tomorrow morning. And mind you come in a cab. We had better not risk taking one in this neighborhood."

Mr. Jay made some brief reply, which I could not overhear. They walked back to the place at which they had met, shaking hands there with an audacious cordiality which it quite sickened me to see. They then separated. I followed Mr. Jay. My subordinates paid the same delicate attention to the other two.

Instead of taking me back to Rutherford Street, Mr. Jay led me

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to the Strand. He stopped at a dingy, disreputable-looking house which, according to the inscription over the door, was a newspaper office, but which, in my judgment, had all the external appearance of a place devoted to the reception of stolen goods.

After remaining inside for a few minutes, he came out, whistling, with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket. A less discreet man than myself would have arrested him on the spot. I remembered the necessity of catching the two confederates, and the importance of not interfering with the appointment that had been made for the next morning. Such coolness as this, under trying circumstances, is rarely to be found, I should imagine, in a young beginner, whose reputation as a detective policeman is still to be made.

From the house of suspicious appearance Mr. Jay betook himself to a cigar-divan, and read the magazines over a cheroot. I sat at a table near him, and read the magazines likewise over a cheroot. From the divan he strolled to the tavern and had his chops. I strolled to the tavern and had my chops. When he had done, he went back to his lodging. When I had done, I went back to mine. He was overcome with drowsiness early in the evening, and went to bed. As soon as I heard him snoring, I was overcome with drowsiness, and went to bed also.

Early in the morning my two subordinates came to make their report. They had seen the man named "Jack" leave the woman near the gate of an apparently respectable villa-residence, not far from the Regent's Park. Left to himself, he took a turning to the right, which led to a sort of suburban street, principally inhabited by shopkeepers. He stopped at the private door of one of the houses, and let himself in with his own key — looking about him as he opened the door, and staring suspiciously at my men as they lounged along on the opposite side of the way. These were all the particulars which the subordinates had to communicate. I mounted to my Peep-hole to have a look at Mr. Jay.

He was occupied in dressing himself, and was taking extraordinary pains to destroy all traces of the natural slovenliness of his appearance. This was precisely what I expected. A vagabond like Mr. Jay knows the importance of giving himself a respectable look when he is going to run the risk of changing a stolen banknote. At five minutes past ten o'clock he had given the last brush to his shabby hat and the last scouring with bread-crumb to his dirty gloves. At ten minutes past ten he was in the street on his way to the nearest cab-stand, and I and my subordinates were close on his heels.

He took a cab, and we took a cab. I had not overheard them appoint a place of meeting, when following them in the Park on the previous day; but I soon found that we were proceeding in the old direction of the Avenue Road gate.

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The cab in which Mr. Jay was riding turned into the Park slowly. We stopped outside, to avoid exciting suspicion. I got out to follow the cab on foot. Just as I did so, I saw it stop, and detected the two confederates approaching it from among the trees. They got in, and the cab was turned about directly. I ran back to my own cab, and told the driver to let them pass him, and then to follow as before.

The man obeyed my directions, but so clumsily as to excite their suspicions. We had been driving after them about three minutes (returning along the road by which we had advanced) when I looked out of the window to see how far they might be ahead of us. As I did this, I saw two hats popped out of the windows of their cab, and two faces looking back at me. I sank into my place in a cold sweat; the expression is coarse, but no other form of words can describe my condition at that trying moment.

"We are found out!" I said faintly to my two subordinates. They stared at me in astonishment. My feelings changed instantly from the depth of despair to the height of indignation.

"It is the cabman's fault. Get out, one of you," I said, with dignity, "get out and punch his head."

Instead of following my directions (I should wish this act of disobedience to be reported at headquarters) they both looked out of the window. Before I could pull them back, they both sat down again. Before I could express my just indignation, they both grinned and said to me, "Please look out, sir!"

I did look out. The thieves' cab had stopped. Where?

At a church door!!!

What effect this discovery might have had upon the ordinary run of men, I don't know. Being of a strong religious turn myself, it filled me with horror. I have often read of the unprincipled cunning of criminal persons; but I never before heard of three thieves attempting to double on their pursuers by entering a church! The sacrilegious audacity of that proceeding is, I should think, unparalleled in the annals of crime.

I checked my grinning subordinates by a frown. It was easy to see what was passing in their superficial minds. If I had not been able to look below the surface, I might, on observing two nicely-dressed men and one nicely-dressed woman enter a church before eleven in the morning on a weekday, have come to the same hasty conclusion at which my inferiors had evidently arrived. As it was, appearances had no power to impose on *me*. I got out, and, followed by one of my men, entered the church. The other man I sent round to watch the vestry door. You may catch a weasel asleep — but not your humble servant, Matthew Sharpin!

We stole up the gallery stairs, diverged to the organ loft, and peered through the curtains in front. There they were, all three, sitting in a pew below.

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Before I could determine what to do, a clergyman made his appearance in full canonicals, from the vestry door, followed by a clerk. My brain whirled and my eyesight grew dim. Dark remembrances of robberies committed in vestries floated through my mind. I trembled for the excellent man in full canonicals — I even trembled for the clerk.

The clergyman placed himself inside the altar rails. The three desperadoes approached him. He opened his book, and began to read. What? — you will ask.

I answer, without the slightest hesitation, the first lines of the Marriage Service.

My subordinate had the audacity to look at me, and then to stuff his pocket-handkerchief into his mouth. I scorned to pay any attention to him. After I had discovered that the man "Jack" was the bridegroom, and that the man Jay acted the part of father, and gave away the bride, I left the church, followed by my man, and joined the other subordinate outside the vestry door. Some people in my position would now have felt rather crestfallen, and would have begun to think that they had made a very foolish mistake. Not the faintest misgiving of any kind troubled me. And even now, after a lapse of three hours, my mind remains, I am happy to say, in the same calm and hopeful condition.

As soon as I and my subordinates were assembled together outside the church, I intimated my intention of still following the other cab, in spite of what had occurred. My reason for deciding on this course will appear presently. The two subordinates were astonished at my resolution. One of them had the impertinence to say to me:

"If you please, sir, who is it that we are after? A man who has stolen money, or a man who has stolen a wife?"

The other low person encouraged him by laughing. Both have deserved an official reprimand; and both, I sincerely trust, will be sure to get it.

When the marriage ceremony was over, the three got into their cab; and once more our vehicle (neatly hidden round the corner of the church, so that they could not suspect it to be near them) started to follow theirs.

We traced them to the terminus of South-Western Railway. The newly-married couple took tickets for Richmond — paying their fare with a half-sovereign, and so depriving me of the pleasure of arresting them, which I should certainly have done, if they had offered a banknote. They parted from Mr. Jay, saying, "Remember the address — 14 Babylon Terrace. You dine with us tomorrow a week." Mr. Jay accepted the invitation, and added, jocosely, that he was going home at once to get off his clean clothes, and to be comfortable and dirty again for the rest of the day. I have to report that I saw him home safely, and that he is comfortable and dirty again (to use his own disgraceful language) at the present moment.

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Here the affair rests, having by this time reached what I may call its first stage.

I know very well what persons of hasty judgment will be inclined to say of my proceedings thus far. They will assert that I have been deceiving myself all through, in the most absurd way; they will declare that the suspicious conversations which I have reported, referred solely to the difficulties and dangers of successfully carrying out a runaway match; and they will appeal to the scene in the church, as offering undeniable proof of the correctness of their assertions. So let it be. I dispute nothing up to this point. But I ask a question, out of the depths of my own sagacity as a man of the world, which the bitterest of my enemies will not, I think, find it particularly easy to answer.

Granted the fact of the marriage, what proof does it afford me of the innocence of the three persons concerned in that clandestine transaction? It gives me none. On the contrary, it strengthens my suspicions against Mr. Jay and his confederates, because it suggests a distinct motive for their stealing the money. A gentleman who is going to spend his honeymoon at Richmond wants money; and a gentleman who is in debt to all his tradespeople wants money. Is this an unjustifiable imputation of bad motives? In the name of outraged morality, I deny it. These men have combined together, and have stolen a woman. Why should they not combine together, and steal a cash-box? I take my stand on the logic of rigid virtue; and I defy all the sophistry of vice to move me an inch out of my position.

Speaking of virtue, I may add that I have put this view of the case to Mr. and Mrs. Yatman. That accomplished and charming woman found it difficult, at first, to follow the close chain of my reasoning. I am free to confess that she shook her head, and shed tears, and joined her husband in premature lamentation over the loss of the two hundred pounds. But a little careful explanation on my part, and a little attentive listening on hers, ultimately changed her opinion. She now agrees with me, that there is nothing in this unexpected circumstance of the clandestine marriage which absolutely tends to divert suspicion from Mr. Jay, or Mr. "Jack," or the runaway lady. "Audacious hussy" was the term my fair friend used in speaking of her, but let that pass. It is more to the purpose to record that Mrs. Yatman has not lost confidence in me and that Mr. Yatman promises to follow her example, and do his best to look hopefully for future results.

I have now, in the new turn that circumstances have taken, to await advice from your office. I pause for fresh orders with all the composure of a man who has got two strings to his bow. When I traced the three confederates from the church door to the railway terminus, I had two motives for doing so. First, I followed them as a matter of official business,

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believing them still to have been guilty of the robbery. Secondly, I followed them as a matter of private speculation, with a view of discovering the place of refuge to which the runaway couple intended to retreat, and of making my information a marketable commodity to offer to the young lady's family and friends. Thus, whatever happens, I may congratulate myself beforehand on not having wasted my time. If the office approves of my conduct, I have my plan ready for further proceedings. If the office blames me, I shall take myself off, with my marketable information, to the genteel villa-residence in the neighborhood of the Regent's Park. Anyway, the affair puts money into my pocket, and does credit to me.

I have only one word more to add, and it is this: If any individual ventures to assert that Mr. Jay and his confederates are innocent of all share in the stealing of the cash-box, I, in return, defy that individual — though he may even be Chief Inspector Theakstone himself — to tell me who has committed the robbery at Rutherford Street, Soho.

Your very obedient servant,
MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO SERGEANT BULMER

BIRMINGHAM, *9th July.*

SERGEANT BULMER, — That empty-headed puppy, Mr. Matthew Sharpin, has made a mess of the case at Rutherford Street, exactly as I expected he would. Business keeps me in this town; so I write to you to set the matter straight. I enclose, with this, the pages of feeble scribble-scrabble which the creature, Sharpin, calls a report. Look them over; and when you have made your way through all the gabble, I think you will agree with me that the conceited booby has looked for the thief in every direction but the right one. You can lay your hand on the guilty person in five minutes, now. Settle the case at once; forward your report to me at this place; and tell Mr. Sharpin that he is suspended till further notice.

Yours,
FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

FROM SERGEANT BULMER TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE

LONDON, *10th July.*

INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE, — Your letter and enclosure came safe to hand. Wise men, they say, may always learn something, even from a fool. By the time I had got through Sharpin's maundering report of his own folly, I saw my way clear enough to the end of the Rutherford Street case, just as you thought I should. In half an hour's time I was at the house. The first person I saw there was Mr. Sharpin himself.

"Have you come to help me?" says he.

"Not exactly," says I. "I've come to tell you that you are suspended till further notice."

"Very good," says he, not taken down by so much as a single peg in his

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own estimation. "I thought you would be jealous of me. It's very natural; and I don't blame you. Walk in, pray, and make yourself at home. I'm off to do a little detective business on my own account, in the neighborhood of the Regent's Park. Ta-ta, sergeant, ta-ta!"

With those words he took himself out of the way — which was exactly what I wanted him to do.

As soon as the maid-servant had shut the door, I told her to inform her master that I wanted to say a word to him in private. She showed me into the parlor behind the shop; and there was Mr. Yatman, all alone.

"About this matter of the robbery, sir," says I.

He cut me short, peevishly enough — being naturally a poor, weak, womanish sort of man. "Yes, yes, I know," says he. "You have come to tell me that your wonderfully clever man, who has bored holes in my second-floor partition, has made a mistake, and is off the scent of the scoundrel who it is that has stolen my money."

"Yes, sir," says I. "That *is* one of the things I came to tell you. But I have got something else to say, besides that."

"Can you tell me who the thief is?" says he, more pettish than ever.

"Yes, sir," says I, "I think I can."

He put down the newspaper and began to look rather anxious and frightened.

"Not my shopman?" says he. "I hope, for the man's own sake, it's not my shopman."

"Guess again, sir," says I.

"That idle slut, the maid?" says he.

"She is idle, sir," says I, "and she is also a slut; my first inquiries about her proved as much as that. But she's not the thief."

"Then in the name of heaven, who is?" says he.

"Will you please prepare yourself for a very disagreeable surprise, sir?" says I. "And in case you lose your temper, will you excuse my remarking that I am the stronger man of the two, and that, if you allow yourself to lay hands on me, I may unintentionally hurt you, in pure self-defense?"

He turned as pale as ashes, and pushed his chair two or three feet away from me.

"You have asked me to tell you, sir, who has taken your money," I went on. "If you insist on my giving you an answer ——"

"I do insist," he said, faintly. "Who has taken it?"

"Your wife has taken it," I said very quietly, and very positively at the same time.

He jumped out of the chair as if I had put a knife into him, and struck his fist on the table, so heavily that the wood cracked again.

"Steady, sir," says I. "Flying into a passion won't help you to the truth."

"It's a lie!" says he, with another smack of his fist on the table, "a base, vile, infamous lie! How dare you ——"

He stopped, and fell back into the chair again, looked about him in a

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bewildered way, and ended by bursting out crying.

"When your better sense comes back to you, sir," says I, "I am sure you will be gentleman enough to make an apology for the language you have just used. In the meantime, please listen, if you can, to a word of explanation. Mr. Sharpin has sent in a report of the most irregular and ridiculous kind; setting down, not only all his own foolish doings and sayings, but the doings and sayings of Mrs. Yatman as well. In most cases such a document would have been fit for the waste-paper basket; but, in this particular case, it so happens that Mr. Sharpin's budget of nonsense leads to a certain conclusion, which the simpleton of a writer has been quite innocent of suspecting from the beginning to the end. Of that conclusion I am so sure that I will forfeit my place, if it does not turn out that Mrs. Yatman has been practising upon the folly and conceit of this young man, and that she has tried to shield herself from discovery by purposely encouraging him to suspect the wrong persons. I tell you that confidently; and I will even go further. I will undertake to give a decided opinion as to why Mrs. Yatman took the money, and what she has done with it, or with a part of it. Nobody can look at that lady, sir, without being struck by the great taste and beauty of her dress ——"

As I said those last words, the poor man seemed to find his powers of speech again. He cut me short directly, as haughtily as if he had been a duke instead of a stationer.

"Try some other means of justifying your vile calumny against my wife," says he. "Her milliner's bill for the past year is on my file of receipted accounts at this moment."

"Excuse me, sir," says I, "but that proves nothing. Milliners, I must tell you, have a certain rascally custom which comes within the daily experience of our office. A married lady who wishes it can keep two accounts at her dressmaker's; one is the account which her husband sees and pays; the other is the private account which contains all the extravagant items and which the wife pays secretly, by installments, whenever she can. According to our usual experience, these installments are mostly squeezed out of the housekeeping money. In your case, I suspect no installments have been paid; proceedings have been threatened; Mrs. Yatman, knowing your altered circumstances, has felt herself driven into a corner; and she has paid her private account out of your cash-box."

"I won't believe it," says he. "Every word you speak is an abominable insult to me and to my wife."

"Are you man enough, sir," says I, taking him up short, in order to save time and words, "to get that receipted bill you spoke of just now off the file, and come with me at once to the milliner's shop where Mrs. Yatman deals?"

He turned red in the face at that, got the bill directly, and put on his

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hat. I took out of my pocket-book the list containing the numbers of the lost notes, and we left the house together immediately.

Arrived at the milliner's (one of the expensive West-end houses, as I expected), I asked for a private interview, on important business, with the mistress of the concern. It was not the first time that she and I had met over the same delicate investigation. The moment she set eyes on me, she sent for her husband. I mentioned who Mr. Yatman was, and what we wanted.

"This is strictly private?" inquires the milliner's husband. I nodded my head.

"And confidential?" says his wife.

I nodded again.

"Do you see any objection, dear, to obliging the sergeant with a sight of the books?" says the husband.

"None in the world, love, if you approve of it," says the wife.

All this while poor Mr. Yatman sat looking the picture of astonishment and distress, quite out of place at our polite conference. The books were brought — and one minute's look at the pages in which Mrs. Yatman's name figured was enough, and more than enough, to prove the truth of every word I had spoken.

There, in one book, was the husband's account, which Mr. Yatman had settled. And there, in the other, was the private account, crossed off also; the date of settlement being the very day after the loss of the cash-box. This said private account amounted to the sum of a hundred and seventy-five pounds, odd shillings; and it extended over a period of three years. Not a single installment had been paid on it. Under the last line was an entry to this effect: "Written to for the third time, June 23rd." I pointed to it, and asked the milliner if that meant "last June." Yes, it did mean last June; and she now deeply regretted to say that it had been accompanied by a threat of legal proceedings.

"I thought you gave good customers more than three years credit?" says I.

The milliner looks at Mr. Yatman, and whispers to me — "Not when a lady's husband gets into difficulties."

She pointed to the account as she spoke. The entries after the time when Mr. Yatman's circumstances became involved were just as extravagant, for a person in his wife's situation, as the entries for the year before that period. If the lady had economized in other things, she had certainly not economized in dress.

There was nothing left now but to examine the cash-book, for form's sake. The money had been paid in notes, the amounts and numbers of which exactly tallied with the figures set down in my list.

After that, I thought it best to get Mr. Yatman out of the house immediately. He was in such a pitiable condition that I called a cab and accompanied him home in it. At first he cried and raved like a child: but I soon quieted him — and I must

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add, to his credit, that he made me a most handsome apology for his language, as the cab drew up at his house door. In return, I tried to give him some advice about how to set matters right, for the future, with his wife. He paid very little attention to me, and went upstairs muttering to himself about a separation. Whether Mrs. Yatman will come cleverly out of the scrape or not seems doubtful. I should say, myself, that she will go into screeching hysterics, and so frighten the poor man into forgiving her. But this is no business of ours. So far as we are concerned, the case is now at an end; and the present report may come to a conclusion along with it.

I remain, accordingly, yours to command,

THOMAS BULMER.

P.S. — I have to add, that, on leaving Rutherford Street, I met Mr. Matthew Sharpin coming to pack up his things.

"Only think!" says he, rubbing his hands in great spirits, "I've been to the genteel villa-residence; and the moment I mentioned my business, they kicked me out directly. There were two witnesses of the assault; and it's worth a hundred pounds to me, if it's worth a farthing."

"I wish you joy of your luck," says I.

"Thank you," says he. "When may I pay you the same compliment on finding the thief?"

"Whenever you like," says I, "for the thief is found."

"Just what I expected," says he. "I've done all the work; and now you cut in and claim all the credit — Mr. Jay, of course?"

"No," says I.

"Who is it then?" says he.

"Ask Mrs. Yatman," says I. "She's waiting to tell you."

"All right! I'd much rather hear it from that charming woman than from you," says he, and goes into the house.

What do you think of that, Inspector Theakstone? Would you like to stand in Mr. Sharpin's shoes? I shouldn't, I can promise you!

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN

12th July.

SIR, — Sergeant Bulmer has already told you to consider yourself suspended until further notice. I have now authority to add that your services as a member of the Detective Police are positively declined. You will please to take this letter as notifying officially your dismissal from the force.

I may inform you, privately, that your rejection is not intended to cast any reflection on your character. It merely implies that you are not quite sharp enough for our purpose. If we *are* to have a new recruit among us, we should infinitely prefer Mrs. Yatman.

Your obedient servant,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

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SPEAKING OF CRIME

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Sock-the-Mystery Year

Nineteen hundred and forty-nine is off to a rousing start as sock-the-mystery year. Not since the great days when we tilted against the Edmund Wilson windmill have mystery writers been subjected to such attacks — and never from such a variety of directions.

After the various Muscovite mutterings about bourgeois decadence which I've quoted in past months, it's hardly surprising that Howard Fast should find it advisable to devote two columns in "The Daily Worker" to an onslaught upon whodunits and especially upon "an incredible item called Ellery Queen's Magazine (*sic*)"; nor that the Marxist arch-humorist Ted Tinsley (who at his best can sound more like three Marxes than one) should pick up the cudgel.

But then that eminent Catholic critic, Father John S. Kennedy, joined in with a few remarks on the "literary barrenness" of detective stories. Thomas Whiteside lampooned the mystery trade in a "Collier's" article as patronizing as it was inaccurate. And meanwhile every pelting petty officer in any city council is preparing an ordinance to save the youth of our nation by restricting crime literature. (At this writing, a bill is pending before the California state legislature which will make it illegal to read Sherlock Holmes before the age of 21.)

Since you are reading this "incredible item," *EQMM*, you will probably file these comments in the proper round file. (Though you might keep an eye on your own city council to see just how far it intends to go in suppression of the press.) But a certain portion of Mr. Fast's attack — his objection to the fascistic brutality of the extreme tough school and to the generally callous treatment of death and the dead — is valid.

The most consoling factor about the Stalinist strictures on the detective story is that we can safely go on believing that the whodunit was invented in America by Poe in 1841, with no fear of being informed that it was really discovered in Moscow by P. M. Sobachinov in 1829.

For you who still cling to "the normal recreation of noble minds," I can report that though 1949 is proving pretty far from a Golden Age, the last few months have produced a handful of extraordinarily good books.

It's a pleasure to say that one of them is Erle Stanley Gardner's THE CASE OF THE DUBIOUS BRIDEGROOM (Morrow). If any of you have felt that the Old Master has been resting

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on his laurels lately, you'll find him back in top form here, with incomparable legal ingenuity and gimmickry.

Another special is Matthew Head's THE CABINDA AFFAIR (Simon & Schuster), wherein Mr. Head enriches the accustomed literate irony of his character studies with much more of a formal detective plot than heretofore.

The year may well close without witnessing a better first novel than Evelyn Piper's THE INNOCENT (Simon & Schuster), or indeed a better "novel of suspense" even from old hands. Miss Piper has all the usual suspense virtues, plus the unusual ones of sharp plotting and absolute economy — and a sense of cumulative terror-in-the-commonplace which Cornell Woolrich might envy.

But the best, even of these bests, is Josephine Tey's THE FRANCHISE AFFAIR (Macmillan). Last year's trend of the novel based (usually without credit) on fact-crime has continued recently with such items as John Rhode's prosily solid SHADOW OF AN ALIBI (Dodd, Mead) on the Wallace case, and Hilda Lewis' harsh and overwritten THE CASE OF THE LITTLE DOCTOR (Random) on Hawley Harvey Crippen. The latest Tey is not so much a reconstruction of the eighteenth-century Canning affair (which you'll recall from Lillian de la Torre's excellent ELIZABETH IS MISSING) as a modern novel on the same theme of imposture by a psychopathic liar. It is possibly an even better novel than Tey's MISS PYM DISPOSES. Stronger praise is not in my vocabulary; that means that if you read only one mystery novel this year, it should be THE FRANCHISE AFFAIR.

Briefer recommendations: To devotees of the polite mystery of manners, Richard and Frances Lockridge's SPIN YOUR WEB, LADY! (Lippincott), one of their suavest non-North ventures to date; and Jonathan Stagge's THE THREE FEARS (Crime Club), which the absence of that Dawn child and the presence of two acridly sketched actresses raises from the Stagge to the Patrick Quentin level.

To admirers of meticulous formal detection: H. C. Branson's John Bent in THE LEADEN BUBBLE (Simon & Schuster); Marten Cumberland's Saturnin Dax in POLICEMAN'S NIGHTMARE (Crime Club); Margaret Erskine's Septimus Finch in GIVE UP THE GHOST (Crime Club) — even if the last is a bit more chilling than logical.

To assorted readers: Rex Stout's TROUBLE IN TRIPLICATE (Viking), wherein Nero Wolfe is in fine fettle for two of its three novelets; Margaret Scherf's drily witty, if a touch callous, GILBERT'S LAST TOOTHACHE (Crime Club); Hammond Innes's lurid, absurd, but exciting THE KILLER MINE (Harper); Gale Gallagher's warmly human CHORD IN CRIMSON (Coward-McCann); D. B. Olsen's lively and eerie THE CAT WEARS A MASK (Crime Club), Stewart Sterling's brash, well-informed DEAD SURE (Dutton).

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Disappointments, to me at least, which you're sure to read anyway on their author's reputations, included Rufus King's slickly fantastic (and incredible) THE CASE OF THE REDOUBLED-CROSS (Crime Club), Margery Allingham's over-elaborate and quote Dickensian unquote MORE WORK FOR THE UNDERTAKER (Doubleday), Fredric Brown's anticlimactically resolved THE BLOODY MOONLIGHT (Dutton), and above all Dorothy Cameron Disney's THE HANGMAN'S TREE (Random), a sort of ultimate of the worst slick-female school which I never expected from one of my favorite novelists.

Aside from the above-cited Piper, the outstanding first novel was Dorothy Salisbury Davis' THE JUDAS CAT (Scribner), an objective, responsible study of small-town life and death which held me entranced. Among other firsts, N. D. and G. G. Lobell's THE SHADOW AND THE BLOT (Harper) combines a good deal of high-falutin artiness with some fine Koberian Bronx characters; Hal Debrett's BEFORE I WAKE (Dodd, Mead) ingeniously offers an unresolved puzzle to the reader as detective; and Helen Knowland's MADAME BALTIMORE (Dodd, Mead), despite technical flaws, presents an amazingly successful picture of a muddle-headed murderer, poised on the precise balance-point between farce and tragedy.

Howard Fast undoubtedly approved highly of Haakon Chevalier's FOR US THE LIVING (Knopf). It's an unusually interesting experiment in the use of the whodunit form as framework for a serious novel; it is also a singularly lifeless and wooden book, despite (or conceivably because of) its vigorously partisan approach to social problems. Two more nearly conventional murder books are also concerned with labor and economics: David Duncan's allegoric and uncanny THE MADRONE TREE (Macmillan) and Brett Halliday's hard-hitting A TASTE FOR VIOLENCE (Dodd, Mead). The NAM will approve of neither; lovers of melodrama will revel in both. (And there is no space here to get into an argument with Halliday on the sociology of his solution.)

Nor does space allow the extensive discussion deserved by various other volumes. I shall simply note that Graham Greene's NINETEEN STORIES (Viking) hit an occasional fine high-point, but rarely in the field in which Greene interests the reader of this column; that a proper review of John Dickson Carr's definitive THE LIFE OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE would occupy the whole of this column and if you aren't going to read it anyway, on the strength of the two names, what are you doing here?; and that the Illustrious Clients (the Indianapolis scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars) have published their SECOND CASEBOOK, edited by J. N. Williamson, with contributions by Edgar Smith, J. F. Christ and others, and an introduction by Ellery Queen on the Queen Collection of Sherlock Holmes First Editions.

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THE FIRST JOYS OF OUR HEART

One of the most pleasant of all editorial pursuits is digging into old magazines for "buried treasure" — for the forgotten stories which, for a generation or more, have been unread, unhonored, and unsung. It is a sort of detectival archeology which explores and rifles the 'tec tombs of the past. The dead of night — the witching hour, the proverbial killing-hour — is the most appropriate time for these dark expeditions, hunting for yesterday's yeggmen and bygone bloodhounds. You prop yourself in bed, slant the night-lamp so that the light crosses your humped knees, arrange the snacks and tidbits within arm's reach, listen to make sure the family is asleep, and then unfold the first of a ragged pile of bent and battered, dusty and musty, pulps and slicks . . . Popular, The Black Cat, Detective Fiction Weekly, Pearson's, Argosy, Famous Story, Clues, Golden Book, Short Stories, Black Mask, Mystery, Adventure, Hampton's, McClure's, Munsey's, Ainslee's, Fiction Parade, Smart Set . . . their names are still like magical incantations . . .

It was on one of those ferreting forays, long past a sensible waking hour for anyone but a night watchman, that we came upon a story titled "Room Number Twenty-Three," by Judson Philips, in a copy of Flynn's a quarter of a century old. Judson Philips? By any spelling that could mean only our good friend, Hugh Pentecost. Is it possible that . . .

We read the story, and got a thrill. Despite its age, it was eminently readable, vastly entertaining, and a most ingenious treatment of the always fascinating "locked room" problem. Here was Grade-A reprint material for EQMM, if only . . . We put out the light and slept fitfully the rest of the night.

In the morning we wrote to the author. Was it really his story? Were the reprint rights available?

The author's reply added piquancy to the discovery. Yes, Jud (Hugh Pentecost) had written "Room Number Twenty-Three"; he was a senior at Columbia University when he sold the story to Flynn's. Moreover, "Room Number Twenty-Three" was the first story Hugh Pentecost ever wrote! (You will find that almost impossible to believe, but remember James Yaffe's "Department of Impossible Crimes" and Leonard Thompson's "Squeeze Play"?)

Wrote Hugh Pentecost to your Editors: "That you have found the story is something of a thrill . . . I have no recollection of the story's

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plot, and I would love to read it. Indeed, I'd give it to you as a gift just for the bang of seeing it in print again." (As it turned out, we paid the author a reprint fee of exactly double what he had received for original publication back in 1925!)

In "Room Number Twenty-Three" you will meet detective James Bellamy, half poet, half dilettante, and all sleuth. The probable origin of Bellamy's name and character is one of the most interesting aspects of the story's history. The author's roommate at Columbia, at the time the story was written, was James Warner Bellah, a well-known writer today. James Bellah — James Bellamy. Coincidence? Hardly, since Mr. Pentecost recalls that in those days Bellah was something of a poet and a dilettante. Was Hugh Pentecost following the lead of Conan Doyle by also modeling his detective after a real person?

As to the author's solution to the eternal problem of the "locked room": Hugh Pentecost's answer, conceived and written in 1925, is one that we have not come upon elsewhere, in "locked room" stories written either before or since. Can we phrase a more mouth-watering prospect?

ROOM NUMBER TWENTY-THREE

by HUGH PENTECOST

I FIRST met James Bellamy during the war and was immediately conscious that he was a remarkable fellow. He was young, scarcely twenty-five, yet he had written two novels and was an Ace in the Royal Flying Corps.

I had not been as fortunate as some others in my war experience.

When the United States went in, I tried to enlist, but discovered that I had a "leaky valve," or some such tommyrot. I finally got into a Red Cross unit, and it was at a field hospital that I ran across James Bellamy. He had come in to have an infected hand dressed and he was much disgruntled at having to give up flying for a week because of so small an injury.

One afternoon while he was there I had to go to the other side of the town for something, and Bellamy offered to go with me. He was a striking figure as he walked down the shell-riddled street in his handsome uniform, twirling a little cane.

We said nothing, as we scarcely knew each other, and Bellamy was just a little too reserved to inspire loquacity. Before we had reached our destination, a heavy fire of enemy shells began dropping about us and we realized that at any minute we might be blown to bits. I was fright-

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ened silly, but Bellamy appeared entirely unmoved.

He sauntered along whistling a little tune and twiddling his stick. He looked at me and his eyes twinkled humorously. If I looked half as frightened as I was I must have been a sorry sight.

"I say, old bean," said Bellamy, "if we've got to die, let's die like gentlemen. Nothing like adopting the proper pose under such circumstances. Pose is all that counts in life." And he offered me a cigarette.

I took one and he held a match for me with steady hands.

"Do you ever read poetry?" he asked.

We continued to our destination discussing poets. Bellamy's utter indifference, at least externally, to the exploding shells was infectious, and I soon found that my pretense of bravery had actually made me forget my fear to a large extent.

The next day I had a few hours to myself, and Bellamy and I went to a little wine shop which had escaped destruction. He ordered Scotch whisky and soda, and I joined him. We continued our discussion of poetry. I found that he was intensely fascinated by all the romanticists in literature, and I confess it surprised me.

Bellamy's air of cynicism had led me to suspect entirely different tastes. I asked him about it. He sat puffing at his pipe for a few moments before he answered.

"It's because I like liars," he said at last. "Lying is dying out altogether too swiftly, and if I get through this fracas I shall devote my time to perfecting the Art of Lying."

"Explain," I said.

"Why, my dear fellow, we can see the hardships and horrors of life on every hand. Why, when we go to literature for entertainment must we read about obvious things? I hate these modern realists. They have no imaginations, so they must write about what they see. But the true artist doesn't care about what he sees, he only cares about what he'd *like* to see. Personally, aside from literature, I believe the truth is a bad habit.

"If you tell the truth you are sure to be found out sooner or later. If you don't tell the truth you amuse your friends a great deal more, and it is much more stimulating to yourself."

"Don't you ever tell the truth?" I asked.

"Only when it is so improbable that no one will believe it," he replied.

The next day Bellamy went back to his post and I didn't see him again. The armistice came and I found myself back in New York. I was fortunate in being able to get back my job on the *Republican*.

I had been reporting for them when war was declared. Donaldson, the managing editor, soon discovered that the war had developed in me a rather keen power of observation and he began sending me out on gruesome leads. I found myself covering all the important and unimportant crimes committed in and about the city.

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One morning I was walking up the avenue when I saw the resplendent figure of a man coming toward me from the opposite direction. He was dressed in a smartly cut dark blue suit, with vest and spats of a lighter color. He wore a slouch hat pulled down at a rakish angle, and smoked a cigarette through a long amber holder. He was twirling a malacca walking-stick carelessly. Something about the way he carried that stick was familiar to me.

"Bellamy!" I cried, as he came abreast. "How the devil are you?"

He looked somewhat bewildered for a moment.

"I say, if it isn't old Renshaw," he drawled.

We shook hands heartily.

"What are you doing with yourself?" I asked.

"Idling, old bean, idling. It's the only profession left open for a gentleman. And you?"

"Unfortunately I have a bestial appetite," I said, "I must work to feed it. I'm reporting for the *Republican.* I'm a journalist."

"Journalist sounds better than reporter," he drawled. "Always put your best foot forward."

"Idling seems to agree with you," I said. "You look exceedingly prosperous."

"As a matter of fact, I have exactly thirty cents to my name," he said.

"Still lying?" I asked suspiciously.

"No. This is one of the times when it is unlikely that you'll believe the truth."

"You really mean you're that hard up?" I asked.

"Well, I've got some duds, furniture and the like, stored away. I'm looking for some simple soul who will supply an apartment and let me supply the furnishings. Some young fellow ought to jump at the chance to live with me. I would be a liberal education to him."

"Are you serious?" I demanded.

"Quite, old bean."

"Well, I'm your man," I said. "I've been looking for some one to share with me and I should be delighted to have you."

He tapped the curbing with his cane thoughtfully before answering.

"Can't tell when I'll have any money," he said shortly.

"That's all right. When you get it will be time enough to worry about that."

"I shall be devilish cross at times. When I'm writing I'm a bear."

"I understand," I said. "Besides, I shall scarcely be in except to sleep and for breakfast."

"I have a gilt angel in a frame and a set of Casanova that I should insist on having around," he said doubtfully.

"Suits me," I said.

He looked up at me with his rare but charming smile.

"I say, this is bully," he said. "You're sure you mean it?"

"Absolutely."

The next few days were hectic. I was at work all day for the *Republican* and in the evenings Bellamy and

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I fussed about trying to settle the little apartment on Gramercy Park. Bellamy's furnishings were really lovely, and at the end of the week we had a place that was perfect.

The apartment was in one of those old remodeled houses, and was blessed with a fireplace in the high ceilinged living-room. Two great windows looked out over the park, and Bellamy had put a comfortable chair by each window. A heavy oak table stood in the center of the room and a couch was backed up against it, facing the fireplace.

Our first night at home we felt like kings. Bellamy, wrapped in a well worn dressing-gown, sat before a little blaze in the hearth and smoked his pipe thoughtfully. He had just filled it from a red can which bore the name of an English tobacconist.

"What kind of tobacco do you smoke?" he asked, seeing me take my pipe and pouch from the mantelpiece.

"Hampshire," I said.

"Try some of this," he suggested, handing me the red can.

I filled my pipe and lit it. He watched me speculatively.

"How do you like it?" he asked.

"It's very smooth," I said.

"How does it compare with Hampshire?"

"Well, it's much smoother," I said, puffing carefully. "It has a quality which a more expensive tobacco is bound to have."

Bellamy chuckled.

"That shows the unreliability of the senses," he said. "That's Hampshire you're smoking. I just keep it in this can because there's a little sponge in the top that keeps it moist."

The next morning, when I got to the office, the chief sent me out on a new case. Something had happened at the old Nathan Hotel, and I was to investigate. The Nathan is one of the landmarks of a society which once centered about Washington Square, but which has since migrated uptown.

Nothing of its ancient splendor remains, except the fine courtesy of employees and the clientele of old New Yorkers depressed in fortune. One could still get a delicious chicken and waffle supper there, the fame of which had lasted through a century. It was not the sort of place where one expected to find a crime of any sort.

But there had been a crime at the Nathan, at least the police thought there had been. It was a very odd thing. A Miss Wilson and her brother Robert had put up there for the night. The Wilsons' father had been one of the Nathan's old customers, and his children, who lived out of town, stayed there when in the city.

With the Wilsons on this occasion was a private detective named Herbert Horton. The reason for the detective's presence was this: Miss Wilson had been left a considerable fortune in jewels by an aunt, recently deceased. These jewels had been left with the family lawyer and Miss Wilson and her brother had come to get them.

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It seems that they had insisted against the lawyer's advice, on taking the jewels with them to their home in Stamford. It was late in the afternoon when they left the lawyer's office, too late to deposit them in a safety vault, and too late to get home without being swallowed in the crush.

The Wilsons had decided to stay at the Nathan for the night and take an early train home in the morning. The lawyer, feeling that the whole procedure was a bit rash, had finally persuaded them to let Horton, the detective, accompany them and see that nothing happened to the jewels.

They had no trouble in getting three rooms at the Nathan. These rooms were on the sixth floor, which, by the way, was the top. The rooms were adjoining, though not connecting, and they looked out over the avenue. The numbers of these rooms were Twenty-One, Twenty-Three and Twenty-Five. Miss Wilson had the center room, with Horton in Twenty-One, and Robert Wilson in Twenty-Five.

When they had got settled in their rooms, Miss Wilson had decided she wanted some tea. Her brother had some letters to write and refused to go down. Miss Wilson left the jewels with him and went down to the old bar, which had been converted into a tea room. Horton remained in his room.

The clerk at the desk saw Miss Wilson go into the tea room, and about half an hour later he saw her go upstairs again. A chambermaid working in the hall saw her get off the elevator at the sixth floor and go to her room. Almost immediately there was a loud scream, apparently from Miss Wilson's room.

The maid stood terrified, staring at the door of Twenty-Three. Horton rushed out of his room and Wilson out of his. They hammered on the door of Twenty-Three. They called Miss Wilson, but there was no answer. The door was locked. Horton turned and saw the chambermaid.

He asked her if she had seen Miss Wilson go into her room and she said she had. They redoubled their cries but to no avail. Wilson finally grabbed a fire ax from the wall and soon demolished the door. Horton rushed in, revolver in hand, and stopped on the threshold, amazed. Wilson stared over his shoulder.

The room was absolutely undisturbed. It was empty. Miss Wilson's coat and other articles hung in the closet. Everything was just as it must have been when she left the room. The window was locked on the inside.

Horton concluded that they had made a mistake, despite the chambermaid's evidence, and that the cry had come from someone else. Wilson went down to see if his sister was still in the tea room.

He came back shortly, white-faced, and told Horton what the clerk had seen. This clerk swore that he had just seen Miss Wilson go upstairs. The Wilsons had often stopped at the hotel, he couldn't be mistaken. Then they questioned the chambermaid.

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She had seen Miss Wilson go into her room. She described Miss Wilson perfectly. There could be no doubt about it.

Horton examined the room carefully. He unlocked and opened the window. There was no means of egress that way. It was a straight drop of six stories to the street. There was no cornice around the building on which any one could walk. Escape by the window was impossible.

There was absolutely no exit from that room except the door, and Miss Wilson hadn't come out of the door. There was no sign of a struggle, nothing to indicate that anything unusual had happened. Yet Miss Wilson had gone into that room, had screamed, hadn't come out, and yet wasn't there.

Horton hinted at foul play, but there was nothing to indicate that such a thing had happened. It seemed that it must have been some peculiar mistake. Miss Wilson couldn't have gone into that room or she'd be there now. They finally concluded that, despite all evidence to the contrary, Miss Wilson hadn't come up, that she had stepped out of the hotel for something.

They waited for her return. But she didn't come back. All night they waited, and during this time the clerk and the maid persisted that what they had said was true. About four in the morning Horton summoned the police.

The police examined the witnesses and the room with the same result. There could be no question of a murder. It was simply a mysterious disappearance. That the girl had gone against her will seemed apparent, inasmuch as she certainly wouldn't have gone off of her own volition without telling her brother.

Immediately a wide-spread search was organized. Every policeman in New York was supplied with a description of Miss Wilson. But nothing happened.

When I finally returned to the *Republican* office to write my story the only additional evidence of any sort was a corroboration of the evidence given by the clerk and the chambermaid. The elevator boy testified that he took Miss Wilson — describing her — up at the time the clerk said he saw her.

He remembered the time because he went off duty at six o'clock. In fact, Miss Wilson was the last passenger he had carried.

But the police obstinately refused to believe that Miss Wilson had ever returned to her room. With a certain sort of stolid logic, they argued that if she had returned she would be there now. No, Miss Wilson was somewhere about the city.

Perhaps some accident, a coincidence under the circumstances, had occurred and Miss Wilson was in a hospital. Every accident ward in the city was searched, but no trace of the missing girl was found.

My own personal opinion was that this was just another of those queer

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disappearances that always have a logical explanation when the lost person turns up. I could not believe, as the police did, that Miss Wilson's disappearance was involuntary. But then, unlike the police, I believed that the girl had returned to her room.

The evidence of those three people was, to my mind, conclusive. One person might make a mistake, but not three. Therefore, since there was no sign of any sort of a struggle, it seemed probable to me that for some inexplicable reason the girl had left the hotel of her own accord. The only thing I couldn't explain was the scream.

If Miss Wilson wanted to get away unnoticed, why did she scream? What was the cause of that scream? Horton, Wilson and the chambermaid all described it as unquestionably a scream of terror. What was the meaning of it?

I finished my article and walked uptown toward Gramercy Park. Though I was very tired, I wanted some fresh air.

It was after midnight when I got to our apartment and I found that Bellamy had already turned in. I went quietly to bed, but it was not to be for long. I was awakened about three by the frantic ring of the phone. It was the editor of the *Republican*.

"Run over to the Nathan," he ordered. "They've found that girl — murdered," he added after a pause.

"Good God," I cried. "Where did they find her?"

"The body was hidden behind some ash barrels in the basement," said the editor. "The hotel porter discovered it accidentally. Shake a leg and get over there. I'm holding up the presses of the next edition for your story."

I began to dress hurriedly, without making any attempt to be quiet. Bellamy came out of his room, wrapped in his long bath robe.

"Devil of a thing to wake up a fellow at this hour," he grumbled. "Never can get to sleep again after I awaken. What's up?"

I told him briefly.

"What are the facts of the case?" he asked, stretching himself out on the couch.

I told him, finishing the narrative as I was putting on my hat to go out.

"Are all the police reporters such fools as you?" he asked.

It was his way of asking a question, like the old legal trick of inquiring of the defendant if he has "Given up beating his wife." An answer either way is an indictment.

There was little to learn at the Nathan besides what the night editor had told me. William Graham, a porter at the Nathan, had made a cache of a bottle of Scotch behind some ash barrels in the cellar. When he reached behind the barrels for his forbidden treasure his hand touched the corpse.

He speedily notified the police, and when I reached the Nathan I found that a special officer had been sent down to question Graham.

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This officer was a rather intelligent fellow named Milliken. He got the porter's story from him and was about to dismiss him when Graham, with a puzzled frown, asked if he might add something to the evidence.

"There's something I'd like to tell, sir," he said, "but in telling you I have to confess to a crime myself. If you'll agree not to prosecute me I can tell you something valuable."

Milliken looked at him shrewdly.

"What sort of a crime have you committed?" he asked.

"You won't pull me in?"

"No. Spill it," demanded the officer shortly.

"Well, sir," began Graham, and he actually blushed, "I'm a bootlegger!" Milliken scowled blackly at some of us who laughed. Graham went on, somewhat hesitantly: "I was in the habit, sir, of keeping a case of liquor back of them barrels. The night that the young girl disappeared, last night, I had some customers.

"They came into the cellar for a case of gin I had for them. What I'm getting at is, that I had that case of gin back of them barrels, right where I found the young girl. She wasn't there, sir, yesterday at this time. What's more she wasn't there this afternoon, that is, yesterday afternoon, strictly speaking.

"I put a bottle of Scotch there about five o'clock when I came on duty. She wasn't there then, sir. That girl was put there, sir, some time between five last night and half-past two this morning."

Milliken smoked a cigarette thoughtfully.

"You'd swear to that, Graham? You'd swear she wasn't there last night at five o'clock? That means that the body was put there at least twenty-four hours *after* she disappeared."

"Yes, sir."

"Could anyone get into the basement without you seeing him?" asked the detective.

"Oh, yes, sir. The basement's a big place. I wasn't near them barrels after five o'clock until I found the young girl."

That was all the porter's evidence. But it made the case more difficult than ever. The police now switched their opinion about Miss Wilson's having gone to her room. There never had been any doubt in my mind. She had gone to her room, some one hiding in the room had struck her down, and had escaped himself, *with the body!*

Miss Wilson must have seen her assailant before he struck her, for she had screamed. But how, by all that's wonderful, had they got out of that room? There simply wasn't any way to get out except by the door, and there hadn't been any escape that way.

The chambermaid had been watching, and Horton and young Wilson had come out of their rooms almost immediately as they heard the scream. There had been less than three minutes before they broke in the door. Three minutes in which the murderer escaped with the body.

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Then, a day later, this murderer had come from wherever he had been hiding and put the body back of those ash barrels.

"The queer part of it is," said Milliken, "that he couldn't have been hiding in the hotel. Mr. Horton and I searched every square inch of it the day after the disappearance. He must have hidden outside somewhere and brought the body back to the hotel last night."

The whole problem was getting too deep for me, and I hurried back to the *Republican* to get an article into the breakfast-table edition. As I reassembled the facts I became more puzzled. A girl is waylaid, probably in an attempt to rob her of the jewels which she didn't have. She screams, and the robber strikes her down. The cause of her death had been a shattering blow on the head.

Then, in three minutes' time, the murderer escapes with his victim from a room from which escape is impossible. He drags the body somewhere outside the hotel, and then, a day later, brings it back and hides it in the basement.

After writing my article I returned once more to Gramercy Park to freshen up. I found Bellamy still stretched out on the couch. He had been smoking a great deal, for the carpet was littered with ashes.

He looked a little pale from his sleepless night. The coffee percolater was bubbling on the table, and the smell of it made me realize that I was ravishingly hungry.

"I was just about to throw together some bacon and eggs," said Bellamy. "You're just in time. What happened?"

I told him between gasps, as I drenched my face and head with cold water from the basin. He lay there, smoking, a queer smile on his face.

"Look here," I said when I had dried my face and hands, "I didn't have time to take up your parting jab this morning. What the devil do you mean by insinuating that I was a fool?"

"Did I insinuate that?" he drawled.

"Yes," I said. "You asked me if all police reporters were such fools as I."

"Did I? Well, perhaps they are. Crime is usually so elemental, the kindergarten of emotions, and you fellows make such a hullabaloo about it. It's ridiculous."

"If you have some brilliant solution to this Wilson business," I said dryly, "explode it. Every poet thinks he knows a devil of a lot about humanity. Suppose you explain this puzzle."

"It looks so simple to me," said Bellamy, "but of course I can't be sure. However, answer these questions if you can."

"Shoot," I said.

"First," said Bellamy, tapping down the ashes in his pipe, "let us get the scene straight. Miss Wilson has a very valuable lot of jewels. They are obviously worth an attempted robbery. But did Miss Wilson publish the fact in the papers that she had them?"

"What are you driving at?" I asked.

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"Just this, old bean. Either it was a coincidence, and some common burglar, a sneak thief hanging about the hotel corridors, chanced into Miss Wilson's room and, being surprised, killed her, or it was not a coincidence, and someone who knew about those jewels was the murderer.

"Now, the people who knew about those jewels were comparatively few. They were her brother and Horton, who were with her, the lawyer who gave them to her, and perhaps one or two of his office force. Now, my dear Renshaw, what do you say? Was it one of these, or was it just a chance burglar?"

"Most likely a chance burglar," I said.

"Very well. Question number two: the police and the reporters have been able to find no exit from that room but the door. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there is another exit, which I hasten to assure you that I don't believe, do you think that, with Horton and Wilson banging on that door with a fire ax, he would stop to drag off the lifeless body of his victim?

"Remember, we are presuming that it was a chance burglar who knew nothing of the jewels. Someone who knew about the jewels might have thought Miss Wilson had them on her person and made the effort to get the body out with him for further search. But do you think even this is probable?"

I admitted that I didn't.

"Question number three," drawled Bellamy. "Presuming that we are wrong about this and that the murderer did drag the body out with him — out of the hotel, mind you, for the police searched every nook and cranny the day after the disappearance, and she wasn't in the hotel — presuming, I say, that he did drag the body out of the hotel, and concealed it in safety somewhere, which is presuming a great deal, can you by any stretch of imagination conceive of his returning the next day with the body and concealing it in the hotel?"

"No, I can't."

"The fourth question is very simple, but to my mind quite pertinent. Presuming that all this happened, can you imagine that in the struggle which took place in Room Twenty-Three, the falling body, the dragging of that body out of the room through the unknown exit — which doesn't exist — nothing would have been disturbed — no chair misplaced, no rumpled carpet — nothing?"

"Frankly, I can't," I admitted.

"Now one more point," he said. "We have been imagining that all this was done by a chance burglar. Is it any more likely that one who knew about the jewels would do these things?"

"No," I said, "it isn't."

Bellamy rose from the couch and pulled the plug out of the coffee percolater.

"Me for some breakfast," he said.

"But the solution?" I cried. "All you've done is to make it seem more difficult than ever."

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Bellamy smiled. "You'll admit," he said, "that none of these suppositions we have made are possible. Therefore an entirely different set of circumstances must have attended the crime. Use your head, old bean, use your head. I'm for a little bacon and eggs, and then I'm going to write a sonnet about the mayor."

"But you can't leave me in the air this way," I complained.

Bellamy wandered toward the kitchenette to cook his eggs.

"Look up the Wilsons' family history," he suggested. "Family histories are always interesting at a time like this."

And Bellamy would say no more, though I pestered him all through breakfast. I went back to the office then and wrote another article, in which I embodied all of Bellamy's questions.

My chief was much pleased and wanted me to continue with a theory as to what actually happened. I couldn't do that, as I hadn't the vaguest notion about it.

I did follow Bellamy's advice, however, and found out what I could about the Wilsons. When I got home that night I told Bellamy what I had discovered.

"They are a family who once had means," I told him. "The father died about three years ago and left nothing but a mass of debts. The girl took a position as private secretary to some man, and Robert Wilson went on the stage. From what I could find out at his club, he is a man of good habits, though usually rather badly in debt."

Bellamy nodded. "Just as I thought," he said cryptically.

"And you have solved the riddle?"

"Been working on the mayor all day," he said. "I knew the solution this morning."

"Good Heavens," I cried, "if you really have any idea of what happened, you ought to tell me. The murderer may be making good his escape."

Bellamy thought for a moment.

"There is just one fact which might scatter my theory to the four winds," he said, "but I'm inclined to think that fact doesn't exist."

"What is that fact?" I asked.

"Were the rooms of Herbert Horton and Robert Wilson searched when the police were looking through the hotel for the body?"

"I see what you are driving at," I said excitedly. "You think the murderer might actually have concealed the body in one of those rooms while Wilson, Horton, and the police were searching the premises!

"Of course the police didn't bother to search those rooms because they knew that they had been occupied by the girl's brother and their own detective when the murder was committed. I think you've hit it," I concluded jubilantly.

"I didn't mean that at all," said Bellamy, "or at least not the way you think I did."

He sat smoking a minute, and then turned to me; and I saw his eyes were unusually bright.

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"Renshaw," he said, "you know how absolutely worthless evidence of the visual sort is. I mean one can't count on the eye of a witness. It's been tried over and over again. A whole roomful of men will be asked to describe a pantomime which has been enacted before them, and no two of them will give the same answer.

"You know that a witness may swear to having seen something, swear honestly, that never happened at all."

"That's true."

"Bear in mind, then, old bean, that the chambermaid's testimony was absolutely false, although she thinks she has told the truth."

"What do you mean?" I cried.

"Wait — tell me, Renshaw, why do the police never believe their own conclusions? They say in this case that there is no possible means of escape from Room Twenty-Three except the door, yet they are trying to find out how Miss Wilson's murderer got out of that room. Renshaw, if there is no way out of that room but the door, *then the murderer never got out.*"

"What do you mean, he was hidden in there? That's impossible, they searched the room immediately they got in."

"I mean," said Bellamy slowly, "*that he never was in that room.*"

"Look here," I said, laughing, "I thought you were being serious."

"That's the trouble with you duffers," said Bellamy with unwonted sharpness, "you haven't the brains to accept the truth. You sit by, in this instance, and solemnly assert that the murderer couldn't have escaped from Room Twenty-Three, and when I tell you he didn't, you scoff at it. Work out your own solution! You'll never find the truth, if you spend all your time contradicting yourself."

"Oh, come, Bellamy, don't be offended," I said. "I thought you were joking. You must admit it sounds ridiculous to say that the murderer didn't escape from the room in which the murder was committed and then that he never was in that room!"

Bellamy smiled.

"Sorry, old bean. I get awfully bored with pigheadedness at moments. But, see here, I said that the murderer wasn't in Room Twenty-Three. The reason he wasn't there was because *the murder wasn't committed in Room Twenty-Three.*"

"Bellamy!" I ejaculated.

Bellamy paused and filled his pipe.

"Thanks for not laughing at that one," he said dryly as he lit his pipe. "Let me get down to what actually happened," he continued, and I detected an unusual enthusiasm in his tone. His eyes were glowing and he twined and untwined his long fingers nervously.

"Look at the scene, Renshaw. Three rooms stand next to each other in the corridor. A chambermaid is cleaning up in the hall. A young girl gets off the elevator and goes to her room. The maid only casually notices this. But when a loud scream is heard the maid looks up, panic-stricken. For a moment she doubts which room the girl entered.

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"There are a dozen similar doors in the corridor. However, she is soon made certain that it was Number Twenty-Three since the gentlemen who have the rooms on either side of Twenty-Three rush out and bang on that door. Then comes the excitement of breaking into the room. It was found empty. Horton turns to the maid and asks her if she saw Miss Wilson go into Room Twenty-Three.

"She swears that she did. But she didn't, Renshaw! She didn't! The thing that made her certain that Miss Wilson *had* entered Twenty-Three was that Horton and Wilson came out and banged on *that* door. Could anything be more natural?"

"It still isn't quite clear," I said.

Bellamy smiled tolerantly. "Listen, old bean, Miss Wilson never went into Twenty-Three. She went either into Horton's room or her brother's. One of those two men attacked her for some reason and killed her. Just before the attack Miss Wilson screamed.

"The murderer had great presence of mind, a presence of mind bordering on genius. Instead of trying to escape he rushes out into the hall — after pushing the body under the bed, say — and bangs on the door that Miss Wilson *ought to have entered.*

"The guiltless man, I won't say which he is for the moment, naturally supposed that the other fellow was acting on the same impulse as himself. He had heard the scream which he suspected came from Miss Wilson. The guiltless man was completely disarmed, never suspected for a moment.

"The chambermaid might have given the whole game away had she carefully noticed which room the girl entered, but she hadn't noticed carefully. When the two men came out and banged on the door of Twenty-Three she thought she was certain, only thought she was certain."

"But, Bellamy," I cried, "which one is it?"

Bellamy leaned forward. He seemed to be thrilled by his own reasoning. He was as excited as a schoolboy.

"What would have made that maid certain about the room?" he asked. "Remember, the evidence of the eyes is not certain, but there is another kind of evidence which is more reliable. The ear, Renshaw, the ear! What might she have heard that would have made her certain about the room?"

"I give up," I said.

"A knock," said Bellamy. "If Miss Wilson had knocked on the door the maid would have looked up, waiting to see who let her in. It was because she *didn't knock* that the murderer has escaped so far and been able to make it seem that the murder took place in Room Twenty-Three.

"But it is because she didn't knock that we can pick the guilty man with absolute certainty. Come, Renshaw, surely you see it now? Which is it Horton or Wilson?"

"I give up," I said. "My mind is whirling round like a pinwheel."

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"So simple," chuckled Bellamy. "It was her brother, of course. If she had gone into Horton's room, she would have knocked! Don't you see? But she walked into her brother's room without a word. Have I convinced you, old bean?"

"But why — why would her brother kill her?"

"Ah, that's not in my province," said Bellamy, stretching contentedly. "I have delivered the murderer to you, now you find out why he did it."

Bellamy was right. I took his theory to Milliken and explained the process of reasoning. He was thunderstruck that it had never occurred to him. Wilson, when confronted with the crime, broke down and confessed everything. He had been heavily in debt.

When his sister had left the jewels with him he had decided to extract some of them from the box and pawn them. But the box was locked and his sister had the key. He had been in the act of prying it open when she walked into his room unannounced. She argued with him and in a fit of passion he struck her down with his walking-stick, a stout piece of Irish thorn.

She had screamed just before he struck her. He knew this scream would attract attention. His mind worked very fast. He pushed his sister's body under the bed and rushed out into the hall. He was startled when he saw the maid, and still more frightened when Horton questioned her, but his ruse had worked.

The only problem that remained was to get the body out of his room. The police searched the hotel from garret to cellar the first day, all except his room and Horton's. There was no thread of suspicion against them. After this rigorous search and failure to find any trace of the girl, the police activities were largely outside the hotel.

He took a chance on the second night and carried his sister's body to the freight elevator, which he manipulated himself. He hid the body back of the ash barrels. He was undetected and apparently free from danger.

The police force very generously gave me the credit for the solution which I, in turn, tried to shift to Bellamy. He refused to take any credit, saying his reputation as a poet would be seriously damaged if it became known that he was an amateur detective.

I have written this story now, several years later, since Bellamy's fame in the field of crime has spread far and wide, and I think it only right that he should receive his due in the famous mystery of Room Number Twenty-Three.

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INDEX TO VOL. THIRTEEN—JANUARY-JUNE 1949

ALLINGHAM, MARGERY: The Case Is Altered....Jan. 65
AMBLER, ERIC: Case of the Landlady's Brother....Feb. 121
ANDERSON, FREDERICK IRVING: The Purple Flame....Jan. 111
ANONYMOUS: Which Is the Heir?...May 78
ARTHUR, ROBERT: Hard Sheriff....June 65
BARRIE, JAMES M.: A Lady's Shoe...June 69
BLAKE, NICHOLAS: A Study in White May 4
BOILEAU, PIERRE: Monsieur Lucien, Burglar....May 58
BOUCHER, ANTHONY:
Homicidal Highspots of 1948....Feb. 126
The Short Shudder....April 78
Sock-the-Mystery Year....June 126
CLARK, DALE: Various Traces....Jan. 81
COLLINS, WILKIE: The Biter Bit....June 105
CONNELL, RICHARD: King of the Firsters....March 45
COPPARD, A. E.: A Broadsheet Ballad....Feb. 114
CRISPIN, EDMUND: Lacrimae Rerum. June 42
DEFORD, MIRIAM ALLEN: Beyond the Sea of Death....May 40
DURANTY, WALTER & O'CONNOR, HUGH: Double Trouble....April 65
EDMONDS, WALTER D.: An Honest Deal....June 28
ELLIN, STANLEY: The Cat's-Paw....June 3
FLANAGAN, THOMAS: The Fine Italian Hand....May 97
FREEMAN, R. AUSTIN: The Missing Mortgagee....May 81
FUTRELLE, JACQUES: The Leak....Feb. 102
GODFREY, PETER: Time Out of Mind....March 48
HAMMETT, DASHIELL: This King Business....Jan. 4
HARRINGTON, JOSEPH: Painted Faces. Feb. 78
HAYS, LEE: On the Banks of the Ohio....March 37
HEARD, H. F.: The Enchanted Garden....March 95
HENRY, O.: Thimble, Thimble....Jan. 45
ILES, FRANCIS: Outside the Law....June 17
IRISH, WILLIAM: Somebody on the Phone....April 141
KAHLER, HUGH MACNAIR: Kick....April 124
KANTOR, MACKINLAY: The Grave Grass Quivers....March 130
KELLAND, CLARENCE BUDINGTON: An Ounce of Curiosity....April 94
KERSH, GERALD: Adventures of Karmesin....May 110
LEVEL, MAURICE: The Maniac....Jan. 78
LIVINGSTON, KENNETH: The Missing Motive....Jan. 92
MACDONALD, PHILIP: Two Exploits of Harry the Hat....Feb. 48
MACHEN, ARTHUR: The Cosy Room. March 32
MAHANNAH, FLOYD: Ask Maria....June 81
MANNERS, DAVID X.: Killer's Keeper....May 121
MASON, A. E. W.: The Italian....April 51
O'CONNOR, HUGH & DURANTY, WALTER: Double Trouble....April 65
ORCZY, BARONESS: Mysterious Death in Percy Street....April 127
PAIN, BARRY: The Problem Club....May 115
PATRICK, Q.: The Jack of Diamonds. Feb. 4
PENTECOST, HUGH: Room Number Twenty-Three....June 129
PEROWNE, BARRY: Up the Garden Path....Feb. 65
QUEEN, ELLERY:
"With the Author's Compliments". Feb. 97
More "Compliments of the Author"....March 60
Annual Report on Prize Contests. April 4
Queen's Quorum: Part One....June 98
REYNOLDS, QUENTIN: Never Trust a Murderer....Feb. 56
ROBERTS, MORLEY: Mithridates the King....April 116
SALTUS, EDGAR: The Grand Duke's Rubies....Jan. 55
SEGRE, ALFREDO: The Roses in Black Velvet....Jan. 136
SHEARING, JOSEPH: The Chinese Apple....April 81
SIMENON, GEORGES: Blessed Are the Meek....April 10
VICKERS, ROY:
Dinner for Two....Jan. 122
The Crocodile Case....March 65
Wit's End....May 128
WALLACE, EDGAR: The Great Bank Fraud....April 106
WALSH, THOMAS: The Good Prospect....Feb. 132
WHITFIELD, RAOUL:
The Rainbow Murders Begin....Feb. 81
White Duck....March 81
Yellow Death....April 37
Red Dawn....May 65
Blue Glass....June 51
WOOLRICH, CORNELL:
Speak to Me of Death....March 4
Momentum....May 16
ZANGWILL, ISRAEL: Cheating the Gallows....March 118

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